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*In preparation.*

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*Each Volume contains a specially written Introduction by the Editor.*

**LONDON: W. HEINEMANN, 25 BEDFORD ST., W.C.**

# SIREN VOICES

(*NIELS LYHNE*)

BY

J. P. JACOBSEN

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH

By ETHEL F. L. ROBERTSON



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1896

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## INTRODUCTION

ABOUT twenty-five years ago, when the school of writers which had so brilliantly illustrated the language and manners of Denmark in the middle of the century was becoming obsolete, there suddenly appeared an author who revolutionised all existing ideas about Danish style, and wrote for a few years, feverishly, painfully, almost morbidly, in a manner hitherto unparalleled in the history of the country. Nothing is more difficult than to give an adequate idea of the peculiarities of mere style in a foreign language. Jacobsen, although he wrote some verses, was pre-eminently a prose-writer, yet the names that come to the mind in trying to produce a relative impression of his effect are those of poets—he is with André Chenier, with Keats, with Rossetti. Dr. Georg Brandes, for whom his books have a positive fascination, and who has returned to their consideration over and over again, compares Jacobsen with a painter, Correggio.

We may go on to say that he fulfils Milton's definition with singular closeness : he is " simple, sensuous, passionate " ; he is above all things a visual writer, he is absorbed

with the splendour of colour, and finds it everywhere. He is an astonishing virtuoso in harmonies of hues, and builds up gorgeous architectural effects which dazzle the eye like a show of prize azaleas. But he is not merely a colourist, and perhaps that single side of his talent has been a little unduly dwelt upon. Jacobsen's astonishing style is hardly less remarkable for its warmth and perfume, its fulness, its marvellously elaborate verbal harmonies. To an English reader, there is a singular resemblance to De Quincey in the flushed, mounting ecstasy of Jacobsen's long spiral sentences ; when he loads the page with involved elucidation of delicate emotional conditions, such a reader is no less reminded of Pater. A foreigner may, at all events, form some conception of the quality which differentiates Jacobsen's style from that of all his countrymen, when one explains that into a literature remarkable for lucidity and a wild-wood sweetness in its prose, this young man seemed to come trailing a long garland of jasmine and stephanotis, and bringing with it a sort of dusky tropical mystery. It is hoped that our translation has not lost all this wonderful melody and perfume ; but it is obvious that to translate Jacobsen to perfection, an English Jacobsen was needed. The author who depends mainly on his style for his fame is peculiarly at a disadvantage in a foreign version. The English reader must be kind enough to take our word for it, that all competent Danish critics agree in saying that no artificer in

prose has ever used the Danish language so subtly as did in his brief career this brilliant "inheritor of unfulfilled renown."

Jens Peter Jacobsen was born on the 7th of April, 1847, at Thisted, a little remote market-town in the north-west of Jutland. He was the eldest of the five children of a prosperous merchant; his parents, from what we learn of their character, were probably not unlike the father and mother of Niels Lyhne. From 1856 to 1862 the boy was at school in Thisted. He then read at home for a year, and in 1863 was sent to Copenhagen to be prepared for the University, which he entered as a student in 1868. As a boy he showed a remarkable turn for science, and filled the house with the fumes of his chemical experiments. At school this tendency concentrated in a passion for botany, which never quitted him. He searched the heaths and bogs around Thisted for every vegetable form that he could discover, and was seldom happy save when wandering alone on a self-instituted botanical expedition. In the earliest of his original MSS., babblings of the future stylist, he is found to have signed himself *Amicus Natura*.

In the summer of 1870, although he was secretly writing verses, Jacobsen seemed to have definitely adopted botany as a profession. In the course of that year, on behalf of a scientific body in Copenhagen, he undertook a botanical examination of the remote islands

of Anholt and Læsö, and returned with an exhaustive catalogue of their flora. About this time the theories and discoveries of Darwin began to exercise a deep fascination on him. He found them imperfectly comprehended in Denmark, and he translated *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* into Danish. His scientific energy in these early years was intense. He began to give special attention to the low vegetable organisms, called Desmidiaceæ; in 1872 he drew up an elaborate monograph on these, which received the gold medal of the University. His zeal, however, proved fatal to him, for late in the autumn of this year, while collecting plants in a morass near Ordrup, he waded into the ice-cold water of the swampy moss with bare feet, and laid the foundations of pulmonary disease. He came this winter for the first time under the personal influence of Dr. Georg Brandes, the most original and the most liberal of the Northern critics of our day. Dr. Brandes saw in MS. the tale, called *Mogens*, which Jacobsen had written a few months before, perceived in it an extraordinary novelty of presentment, and urged him to cultivate this gift.

Meanwhile, suffering from cold after cold, Jacobsen was more and more shut off from scientific experiment, and thrown upon literature. He had not yet discovered his full individuality; he was still considerably influenced by certain Danish authors of the older school, particularly

by Hans Christian Andersen. In the spring of 1873 he began his great historical romance of *Marie Grubbe*, but when three chapters were written, he was so ill that he had to put it aside. At the doctor's orders he started for the south of Europe, and in Florence he spit blood for the first time. But rest and travel did him good; in October he returned to Thisted more cheerful; yet a specialist who examined him thought it would be a miracle if, with extreme care, his life could be prolonged for two years. He spent the next months in complete seclusion, among his people at Thisted, and the few who had formed high hopes of his talent believed that they would hear of it no more. In my own Journal of a visit to Denmark in 1874, I find under the date May 24, this entry:

"Georg Brandes told me to-day that the only young man who shows anything like first-rate promise now is a certain J. P. Jacobsen, who is only 23 [he was really 27, but looked so youthful that Dr. Brandes must have underestimated his age]. He is a botanist and a Darwinian, but he has begun an historical romance, of which Brandes has seen the early chapters. He says the style of them is amazing. But, he added, dropping his voice suddenly into an almost querulous tone, 'he is the only one, and now—*han dør*, he is dying.' This Jacobsen is hopelessly ill, with consumption, at Thisted, and will probably die without having produced anything finished enough for publication."



However, Fate was not quite so cruel as that ; Jacobsen had still eleven years of broken life before him. In October 1874 was published, in Copenhagen, the first number of *Det nittende Aarhundrede* ("The Nineteenth Century"), a literary and critical monthly, edited by Georg and Edvard Brandes. In this review the newest Danish authors found an asylum, and a few foreign writers, with whom they were in sympathy, such as Emile Zola, Viktor Rydberg, Paul Heyse, and Henrik Ibsen, occasionally contributed ; the present writer, being then very fiery and revolutionary, was also permitted to hold forth. The presumptive reason for this publication was to provide ebullient young Denmark with an organ ; but I always fancied that it was mainly an excuse to let Jacobsen see himself in print before he died. In the very first number in the place of honour, appeared the two opening chapters of *Marie Grubbe's Childhood*. No more was published, than this fragment, and though the review survived, under the same management, until September 1877, Jacobsen, I have never been able to conjecture why, did not contribute to it again.

He worked very slowly and critically, almost confined to the house in Thisted, and seeing no one from the world of letters. Before he had finished *Marie Grubbe* as early as the spring of 1875, he began *Niels Lyhne*, but instantly laid it aside. In December 1876 *Marie Grubbe* was published in Copenhagen, and achieved at

once a very signal success ; it was recognised from the first as the greatest historical novel in the Danish language. The author had given his book the sub-title "Interiors from the Seventeenth Century," and he had endeavoured to paint the historic and somewhat shadowy Marie Grubbe moving in a richly crowded scene of almost innumerable figures ; the social Copenhagen of two hundred years ago, so picturesque and strange, shifting like an ant-hill before our eyes. The young author was astonished at the success of his book, but his health left him little opportunity for self-gratulation. It grew steadily worse, and in the winter of 1877 it drove him to Montreux. He was painfully desirous not to disappear until he had given more proof of the genius that was in him, and he took up *Niels Lyhne*, but made slow progress ; Flaubert was now his constant study. The next winter he spent in Rome, and once more took up his novel, in which increasing weakness and increasing fastidiousness made his advance less and less rapid. Throughout 1879 he was so ill that he could scarcely write a letter ; the novel stopped entirely, and the sense of forced inaction depressed his spirits and threw an added gloom over his life. But there came alleviation of his complaint, and in the course of 1880, in the old house at Thisted, *Niels Lyhne* was victoriously finished.

He began to suffer at this time from vague suspicions of his devoted friends, and from gloomy, feverish con-

ditions of temper ; the record of these, closely, pathetically, reminds us of the sad, last months of Keats' life. In the middle of 1881 Jacobsen could bear the solitude of Thisted no longer, and he moved into a lodging in Copenhagen, a dreary house in Ny Adelgade, where his existence has been powerfully and painfully described by Dr. Georg Brandes. His only luxuries were a *chaise-longue*, the gift of certain anonymous female admirers, and daily posies of flowers, wild and greenhouse, which he delighted in above all other things. He continued to talk of composing a third great book ; he was full of schemes ; among other things he proposed to write a romance about the Borgias.

In 1882 he put together six short stories, the incidental labour of ten years, into a volume called, from the first of these, *Mogens*. In this little book all was exquisite ; here was the quintessence of his wonderful style. But Jacobsen was to write no more ; month by month his strength failed him ; in the summer of 1884 he was taken home to Thisted to die. Yet there he lingered till the 30th of April 1885. Long after his interests in literature and mankind had evaporated, his passion for plants survived. He lived on in the hope of seeing the spring flowers break forth, one by one, in the late season of his rugged Jutland. On the day he died, his mother brought in to his bedside the earliest spray of cherry-blossom. His eye flashed for a moment at the sight of it—"What a pity to break it off

for me," he whispered, and spoke no more. He was buried in the churchyard of his native town. In 1886 his scattered fragments were published, and in 1888 his collected works. Although he wrote so little, he passed at once into immortality, and is, alone of his generation, already one of the classics of his native country.

Dr. Georg Brandes, whose recollections of Jacobsen are singularly pertinent and penetrating, records a conversation in which the young novelist, so early as 1875, explained to him his purpose in composing *Niels Lyhne*. Jacobsen said: "I want to write a book about foolish freethinkers; *Marie Grubbe* is all mere pearl-embroidery."

"What do you mean," asked Brandes, "by foolish freethinkers? People who don't think the matter out?"

"Oh! no, but those who can't manage to get through life without, every now and then, appealing to heaven for help. Don't you see, the very basis of the matter is—you fold your hands and you gaze up to the sky—that is the whole thing, and in that there lives or from that there follows everything else, our entire theology, and that is what, when once they are in difficulties, people cannot avoid doing."

"Will the action be laid in our own time?"

"No, in the generation that was as old as we are now, when we were born. You follow me? I express myself clearly, eh?"

"Perfectly clearly," assented Dr. Brandes.

"Well," continued Jacobsen, "among other things that generation had its freethinkers too. Their free thought was a little dim and vague, but, in any case, it was something to begin upon. But the worst of it was that this free thought proved to be not very easy to pass through the world with, and in fact impeded one's career, talent, position, and relation to one's friends, and one found that one had not merely shut one's self out of the granaries of Egypt, but that one missed the manuring traditions that fed one's spiritual growth; in short that one was made to rely upon one's self to a frightful degree; one found, that on the whole the liberty one had gained was a heavy burden to bear. The consequence was that some people could not endure it any longer, and deserted. Others curtailed their free thought and remained freethinkers only on unessential points; then there were others who kept to their principles and attacked the old ideas, although without really respecting the new ones; and yet again there were those who honourably tried to persevere, but who, in times of adversity, found the burden too heavy for their shoulders."

"That is the type you mean to draw?"

"Yes. The name of the book will be *Niels Lyhne*. It will be a chronicle of youth. It is youth, which, in the novel I am writing, grows, loves, chatters, fails, fights, is disillusioned and swept away. By its virtues

and its vices, by its cowardice and its ruin, I shall show how difficult it is for a man to be a freethinker in a country like Denmark, with the siren-voices of tradition and the memories of childhood on one side and the censoriousness of society on the other."

"But," said Brandes, "will not this make a rather metaphysical story; a little too abstract and bony, a little hard in outline?"

"No, not at all. The outline will be perfectly soft and undefined, veiled, and steeped in the colour of amorous dreams and amorous sorrows, amorous longings and amorous yearnings—the metaphysic of it psychological throughout, and the psychological part physiological throughout; what do you say to that?"

"What I say is—write the book."

Jacobsen did write the book, and here it is in English.

EDMUND GOSSE.



# SIREN VOICES

(*NIELS LYHNE*)

## I

IF had the Bliders' sparkling black eyes and straight, pencilled eyebrows; she had their well-formed nose, their powerful chin and full, curved lips. She had also inherited the strange lines, half sad, half sensuous, at the corners of her mouth, and those restless movements of the head, but her cheek was pale, her hair was as soft as silk and adapted itself smoothly and gracefully to the contour of her head.

The Blidêrs were not like this; their colours were roses and bronze. Their hair was coarse and curly—thick as a mane; and they had full, deep, flexible voices, which lent every support to the family traditions of the noisy hunting-parties, solemn morning devotions and countless love-adventures of their ancestors.

But her voice was languid and lifeless.

I speak of her as she was at the age of seventeen; a few years later, when she was married, her voice was fuller, the colour on her cheek fresher, and her eyes had grown duller, but



seemed, at the same time, larger and deeper in colour.

At seventeen she was altogether different from her brothers and sisters, and no very close tie existed between her and her parents. The Bliders were a practical race, and took life as it came ; they did their work, slept their sleep, and it never entered their minds to seek other or further diversion than the harvest-home and three or four Christmas parties. They were not fervidly religious, but they would as soon have thought of not paying their taxes as of not rendering to God the things that were God's ; and therefore they said their evening prayers, went to church on high festivals, sang their psalms on Christmas Eve and took the sacrament twice a year. Neither were they desirous after knowledge ; and as for their sense of beauty, they were by no means unsusceptible to sentimental little songs, and when summer came and the grass grew thick and luxuriant in the meadows, and the corn waved in the broad fields, they often said to one another that this would be a fine time to take a journey somewhere ; but they were not of a particularly poetic nature, beauty did not intoxicate them, and they knew as little of undefined longings as of waking dreams.

But it was otherwise with Bartholine. She took no interest whatever in matters connected with the stable and the fields, no interest in dairy and household—none at all.

She loved poetry.

She lived in poetry, she dreamed in poetry, and she believed in it as in almost nothing else.

Parents, brothers and sisters, neighbours and acquaintances, never said a word worth listening to, for their thoughts as seldom rose above the spot of earth or the business they had on hand as their glance wandered from the events and circumstances immediately before them.

But poetry, on the other hand! For her it was full of new thoughts and profound truths about life out in the world, where sorrow is black and joy is red; it glittered with images, foamed and sparkled with rhythms and rhymes: it was always about young girls, and the young girls were noble and beautiful, how much so they themselves knew not; their hearts and their love were more than all the riches of the world, and men treated them with great tenderness, held them high aloft amid the sunshine of happiness, honoured and adored them, were proud to share with them their thoughts and plans, their triumphs and renown, and insisted, into the bargain, that no other than these fortunate maidens had fostered the plans and achieved the successes.

And why might not I be a girl like this myself? They are this and that and they do not know it; how do I know what I am? And the poets said distinctly that *this* was life, and that sewing and knitting, doing housework and paying stupid visits was not life at all.

Strictly speaking, there was really nothing in this but the slightly morbid desire to become conscious

of herself, the endeavour to realise herself, that so often awakens in a young girl of more than ordinary talent, but the misfortune was that there was not a single superior nature in her whole circle of acquaintances by which she might have measured her own gifts ; there was not even a congenial nature, and therefore she began to consider herself something extraordinary and exceptional, a sort of tropical plant which had shot up under an unfriendly sky and could only make a pitiful attempt to unfold its leaves, whereas in a warmer clime, beneath a brighter sun, it would have put forth slender stems, crowned with a rich and radiant show of flowers. That, she thought, was her real nature ; that was what the proper surroundings would have made her ; and she dreamed a thousand dreams of those sunny places and was consumed with longing for her true, rich self, forgetting what it is so easy to forget, that even the fairest dreams, even the deepest longings, add not a single inch to the stature of the human soul.

Then one fine day some one came to woo her.

Young Lyhne of Lönborggaard—it was he—was the last male representative of a family which for three whole generations had been one of the most intellectual in the province. In their latter years the Lyhnes served their king and country actively and honourably as burgomasters, sheriffs, or royal commissioners, and were frequently honoured with the title of Councillor of Justice. In their young days they travelled methodically through France and

Germany, enriching their receptive minds with the information, artistic pleasures and new experiences that foreign countries offered them in such rich measure ; and when they returned home, these years of exile were not laid by with other old memories, as we put aside the memory of a fête when the last taper has expired and the last tone died away—no, their life at home was built up on these years, and the interests they had awakened were not allowed to fall into decay, but were sustained and developed by all the means they had at their disposal. Choice engravings, costly bronzes, the works of German poets, French legal treatises and French philosophy were things and themes of everyday in the Lyhnes' house.

With regard to their demeanour, they moved with an old-fashioned ease and modest affability which often contrasted oddly enough with the clumsy dignity and awkward stateliness of their neighbours. Their conversation was well-turned and delicately pointed, although, it must be admitted, rather affectedly rhetorical ; but how well it suited these broad, tall figures with their high, arched foreheads, their thick, curly hair, growing far back on the brow, their gentle smiling eyes and well-formed, slightly aquiline noses ! The lower part of the face, however, was too heavy ; the mouth was too wide and the lips were too thick.

Just as these external characteristics were less prominent in young Lyhne, so, too, his intelligence seemed to have grown weary, and the intellectual problems or earnest artistic pleasures that came in

his way were far from awakening him to any kind of zeal or ambition. He set about them with a conscientious effort which was not counterbalanced by any pleasure in feeling that his faculties were set in motion, nor was he rewarded by any proud sense of self-reliance when it proved that these faculties were equal to the task. The only reward he had was the satisfaction of having made the attempt.

He had recently inherited his house, Lönborg, from an uncle and, wishing to superintend the management of his property himself, he returned from the traditional journey abroad. The Bliders were his nearest neighbours, and as his uncle had been on intimate terms with the family, he paid them a visit, saw Bartholine and fell in love with her.

That she fell in love with him was almost a matter of course.

At last some one had come from that outside world, some one who had lived in those great cities far away, where forests of towers and steeples stood out against the sunny sky ; where the air quivered with the chiming of bells, the pealing of organs and the sharp tones of the mandoline, and glittering pageants, resplendent in gold and colours, wound through the broad streets ; where marble palaces glistened and the motley scutcheons of proud families hung in pairs above lofty portals, while fans flashed and veils fluttered on the projecting stone balconies above. Some one who had wandered through those regions where conquering armies had forced their way ; where mighty battles

had invested fields and villages with immortal glory ; where the smoke of gipsy fires rose slowly above the tree-tops of the forest, and red ruins looked down from their vine-wreathed heights upon the smiling valleys, where the mill-wheel murmured and tinkling flocks came home across high-arched bridges.

He told her of all these things, not as the poets did, but with a far more convincing reality, and he spoke of them just as familiarly as those about her spoke of the neighbouring towns and parishes. He talked, too, of painters and poets, and lauded to the skies names that she had never heard. He showed her their pictures and read their poetry with her down in the garden on the hill, whence they could look out over the glittering surface of the fjord and the brown billows of the heath. Love made him poetic, and their surroundings grew beautiful ; the clouds became those clouds which drifted through the poems, and the trees in the garden bore the drooping foliage that rustled so plaintively in the ballads.

Bartholine was happy, for her love turned day and night into a series of poetical situations. Thus it was poetry when she went down the path to meet him, the meeting was poetry, the parting, too ; it was poetry when she stood on the hill in the splendour of the setting sun to wave him a last farewell, and then sorrowful, yet glad, repaired to her lonely room to think of him undisturbed ; and when she prayed for him in her evening prayer, that, too, was poetry.

She no longer had undefined wishes and longings as of yore. This new life with its varying moods was enough for her, and her thoughts and opinions grew clearer through having some one with whom she could be perfectly unreserved without fear of being misunderstood.

She had changed, too, in another respect : happiness made her more affectionate towards her parents and brothers and sisters, and she found that they were really more sensible and had more feeling than she had believed.

And so they were married.

The first year was very like the time of betrothal, but as the union grew older, Lyhne could no longer conceal from himself that he was growing weary of continually giving new expression to his love, of always being wrapped in the plumage of poetry and of keeping his wings ever spread for flight through all the heavens of moods and all the depths of thought. He longed to sit on his twig in peace and quiet, and drowsily hide his tired head in the soft down under his wing. He could not think or love as an ever-flickering flame which lit up all the peaceful recesses of existence with its fierce, unsteady glare, making everything appear larger and stranger than it was—to him love seemed more like gently glowing embers, which throw out a steady warmth from their soft bed of ashes, veiling distant objects in a softened twilight and making those near at hand doubly near and doubly cheerful.

He was tired—worn out ; he could not endure all this poetry ; he longed for the firm ground of every-

day life, as a fish, choking in hot air, must long for the clear, fresh coolness of the waves. It would have to end, to end of itself. With regard to life and books, Bartholine was no longer inexperienced; she was as familiar with them as he himself. He had given her all he had and yet he was still to go on giving. It was impossible; he had no more. His only consolation was that Bartholine would soon be a mother.

For a long time Bartholine had observed with concern that she was gradually beginning to see Lyhne from a different point of view, and that he no longer stood on those dizzy heights where she had placed him during the time of their engagement. She still did not doubt that his was, what she called a poetic nature, but she felt uneasy, for prose had now and then begun to show its hoof. She pursued poetry more ardently than ever, and endeavoured to restore the old order of things by overwhelming him with a still greater profusion of moods, with still greater ecstasy, but she met with so little response that even to herself she seemed sentimental and affected. For a time, however, she tried to drag the reluctant Lyhne after her; she would not believe what she suspected, but when at last the fruitlessness of her endeavours began to raise doubts in her mind as to whether *her* heart and soul really contained such wealth as she had believed, she suddenly left him alone, grew cold, silent and reserved, and sought solitude to mourn in peace over her shattered illusions. For she saw now that she had been bitterly deceived, that Lyhne



was at heart in no wise different from her old surroundings, and that what had deluded her was the very ordinary fact that his love—and this happens so often with lower natures—had surrounded him for a brief hour with a transient halo of intellect and grandeur.

Lyhne was both grieved and uneasy at this change in their relations, and he strove to put things straight by unsuccessful attempts to take the old extravagant flights again ; but this only served to show Bartholine still more clearly how great her mistake had been.

Such was the state of things between them when Bartholine brought her first child into the world. It was a boy, and they called him Niels.

## II

To a certain extent the child drew the parents together again, for they always met by its little cradle with common hopes, with common joys and common fears. They thought of it and they spoke of it with equal readiness and equal frequency, and each was so grateful to the other for the child, for the happiness it brought and the love it inspired.

But there was still a wide gulf between them.

Lyhne was wholly engrossed in agricultural pursuits and local matters, without, however, in any way assuming the attitude of a leader or reformer. He conscientiously made himself acquainted with the existing state of things, looked on as an interested spectator, or entered into the cautious improvements which his old steward or the oldest local authority, after careful, *very* careful, consideration, proposed.

It never occurred to him to make use of the knowledge acquired in former years; for this he had too little faith in what he called theory and too great a respect for those maxims of experience which had grown venerable in the course of time, and which to others seemed to sum up the essence of the practical. On the whole, there was nothing

about him to show that his whole life had not been spent in the same place and the same way. One little thing, however, excepted. He would often sit on a gate or a boundary-stone for half an hour at a time, gazing with a strange vegetative fixedness at the luxuriant green rye or golden heavy-eared oats. This was a relic of other days ; it recalled his former self, the young Lyhne.

Bartholine could not accommodate herself to *her* world as suddenly as this—not without some resistance, without first feeling her way. No, at first she complained of the thousand fetters and trammels of human life in the verses of hundreds of poets imbued with all the broad generality of that time. Sometimes her lament was clothed in the lofty wrath that hurls invectives at the thrones of emperors and the prisons reared by tyrants ; at others in the quiet, compassionate grief that sees the rich light of beauty departing from a blind and servile race, cowed and worn out by the inane bustle of the day ; and again her lament was but the silent yearning for the free flight of a bird or of the cloud that sails so lightly into the distance.

But she grew tired of lamentation, and its irritating uselessness drove her to doubts and bitterness. Just as some worshippers shatter their idol and trample it underfoot if it refuses to show its power, so now she scoffed at her once adored poetry, asking herself scornfully if she did not believe that Sindbad's roc would alight on the cucumber-bed, or Aladdin's cave open under the floor of the milk-cellar. In childish cynicism she took pleasure in

finding the world excessively prosaic, called the moon a green cheese and the roses pot-pourri—all this with the feeling that she was revenging herself, but also with the half fearful, half stimulating consciousness that it was blasphemy.

The attempt at self-deliverance that lay in this was unsuccessful. She sank into her dreams again, the dreams of her girlhood, but the difference was now that they were no longer illumined by hope; then, too, she had learned that they were *only* dreams, distant, delusive meteors, which no longing in the world had power to draw down to *her* earth; and when she now abandoned herself to them she did so with some uneasiness and in defiance of a reproachful voice within her, which whispered to her that she was like the drunkard, who knows that his passion is fatal, and that every new debauch means strength taken from his weakness and given over to the power of his passion. But the voice spoke in vain, for a temperate life without its sweet burden of dreams was no life—life had only the value that dreams gave to it.

Thus widely different were little Niels Lyhne's father and mother, the two friendly powers which, without knowing it, contended for the possession of his young soul from the moment that a gleam of intelligence appeared, with which they might begin; and as the child grew older, the struggle grew fiercer, for the choice of weapons became more unlimited.

The child's imagination was the faculty through which his mother tried to influence him, and imagina-

tion he had in abundance ; but while yet very young, it was clear that a considerable difference existed for him between the imaginary world that appeared at his mother's word and the real world. It happened more than once, when his mother was telling him stories and describing how great the hero's sufferings were, that Niels, who could find no possible escape from all this misery, nor see how to remedy all this distress, which closed in ever-narrowing, impenetrable circles round him and his hero—in fact, it happened many a time that Niels suddenly pressed his cheek against his mother's and, with tears in his eyes, and trembling lips, whispered: " But it is not *really* true ?" And on receiving the reassuring answer for which he hoped, he drew a deep sigh of relief and heard the story to the end without further uneasiness.

But his mother was not quite pleased with this desecration of his colours.

When he grew too big for fairy-tales and she tired of inventing them, she told him, with slight additions, about all the heroes of war and peace whose lives were fitted to show the power that dwells in a human soul, if that soul only desires great and noble things, and is neither alarmed and discouraged by, the short-sighted doubts of the day, nor allured into the enervating lethargy they produce. The stories were in this key, and as history did not possess enough suitable heroes, she chose an imaginary hero for whose deeds and destiny she alone was responsible—a hero after her own heart, spirit of her spirit and flesh even of her own flesh and blood.

A few years after Niels' birth she had brought a still-born son into the world, and her choice fell upon him. All that this child might have achieved and become was now laid before his brother in restless and uncontrolled confusion—the yearning of a Prometheus, the courage of a Messiah, the strength of a Hercules—a naïve travesty, a world of cheap fancies, which no more embodied a reality that had ever existed than the poor little child's skeleton that was crumbling to dust and ashes up in the churchyard at Lönborg.

Niels did not go wrong as to the moral of these stories; he perfectly understood that it was contemptible to be like the generality of mankind; he was ready to take upon himself the hard fate of his heroes, and in imagination he willingly endured consuming strife and harsh misfortune, the martyrdom of being misunderstood and the victory without peace. All the same, however, it was an incomparable relief to him to think that it was still so far off—that all this would not happen until he was grown up.

As the dream-visions and dream-music of a night may haunt the waking day, and in misty form and vague tones call to our thoughts so that for a fleeting second they listen, as it were, wondering if anything has really called—so the idea of that dream-born future whispered softly all through Niels Lyhne's childhood, reminding him gently but incessantly that a limit was set to this happy time, and that one day it would be no more.

The consciousness of this begot a craving to

enjoy his childhood in all its fulness, to drink it in through all his senses, not to lose a drop—a single drop. There was, in consequence, an intensity in his games, which rose to a passion under the pressure of the uneasy feeling that time was hurrying past him, while he was powerless to save from its rich tide all that each succeeding wave laid at his feet. Hence, too, he would throw himself on the ground and sob in despair if time hung heavy on a holiday because something or other was wanting—play-fellows, the power of invention, or fine weather—and this, too, was the reason why he was always so unwilling to go to bed ; for sleep was uneventful and absolutely void of sensation. But it was not always so.

It happened sometimes that he grew tired and his imagination had no colours left. Then he felt very unhappy, felt far too small and pitiful for those ambitious dreams ; in fact, it seemed to him that he was a base liar who had impudently pretended to love and understand great things, while, in reality, all lowborn wishes and desires had root within him, while he could only feel for what was small and mean, and love what was commonplace. Indeed, it sometimes seemed as if he cherished the class-hatred of creeping things for what is lofty, and would joyfully help to stone those heroes who were of better blood than he, and who knew that they were.

On such days he avoided his mother, and with the consciousness that he was following an ignoble instinct, sought his father, and had a willing ear and an open mind for all the latter's earth-bound thoughts

and matter-of-fact explanations. He felt so happy then with his father, so glad that he was his equal, and almost forgot that this was the same father upon whom he had looked down with compassion from the pinnacles of his dream-castle. Of course, this was not present to his childish consciousness with the clearness and precision that words give it, but it was there all the same—immature, unborn, in vague, unintelligible, embryonic form. It was like the wonderful vegetation of the sea-bottom seen through half-transparent ice. Break the ice, or drag what lives in darkness into the light of speech, the result is always the same—what is now seen and understood is not, in its present state of clearness, the shadowy mystery it was.



### III

AND years passed. One Christmas followed another, leaving the air filled with its festive splendour until long after Twelfth-day. One Whitsuntide after the other passed over the flowery fragrance of the spring meadows. Summer holidays and summer holidays drew nigh, celebrated their out-door orgies, their feasts of sunshine, and poured their summer-wine from brimming cups, and then, one day, they vanished with the setting sun, and only the memory of them remained with sunburnt cheeks, astonished eyes and feverish blood.

And years passed, and the world was no longer the world of wonders it had once been. Those dark corners behind the dead elder-trees, those mysterious garrets, that eerie stone coffin below the road to Klastруп—from one and all the thrill of the marvellous had vanished. And that long bank which, at the lark's first song, hid its grass under the purple-rimmed stars of the daisy and the yellow bells of the primrose, the brook with its fantastic treasures of animals and plants, the wild precipices of the sand-pit with their bounding black stones and glittering splinters of granite—now they were only stupid flowers, animals, and stones: the shining

gold of the fairy had once more turned to withered leaves.

One game after another became old and absurd, as stupid and wearisome as the pictures in an A B C book, and once they had been so new, so inexhaustibly new. Here they had played with barrel-hoops—Niels and Frithiof, the pastor's son—and the hoop was a ship, which stranded if it fell over, but if it could be caught before it fell, it was called casting anchor. The narrow path between the outhouses, along which it was so difficult to pass, was Bab-el-Mandeb, or the Gate of Death; "England" was written in chalk on the stable-door and "France" on the barn-door; the garden-gate was Rio de Janeiro, but the smithy was Brazil. They also played at being Holger Danske; this *could* be played among the great burdocks behind the barn, but up in the miller's field there were some holes where the earth had fallen in, and here dwelt Prince Burmand and his wild Saracens, with their reddish-grey turbans and yellow plumes, with burs and torchweeds of tremendous size. This was the proper Mauritania; for the boundless luxuriance, the dense masses of succulent vegetation spurred on the destructive instinct and filled their minds with delight, the wooden swords glittered like steel, the green sap dyed the blades blood-red, and the stems they cut down were trampled underfoot like Turkish corpses under horses' hoofs, with a sound of bones being crushed to powder.

They had played down by the fjord; mussel-shells were sent out as ships, and if they caught on

a bunch of sea-weed, or stranded on a sandbank, it was Columbus in the Sargasso Sea, or the discovery of America. Harbours and mighty embankments were constructed, the Nile was dug out in the firm sand, and once they built Castle Gurre with pebbles—a little dead fish in an oyster-shell was the dead Tove, and they themselves were King Valdemar sitting mourning beside her.

But that was over now. ●

Niels was a big boy of twelve, almost thirteen, and no longer needed to hack at thistles and burdocks to satisfy his knightly aspirations, or to send out his dreams of exploration in mussel-shells. A book and a sofa-corner were sufficient now, and if not, if the book would not bear him to the wished-for shore, he sought out Frithiof and told him the story that the book refused to tell. They went along the road arm in arm, one relating, both listening, but when they really wanted to enjoy themselves, to give full play to their imagination, they hid in the fragrant darkness of the hay-loft. These stories, however, that came to an end just as they were really getting into them, were soon combined into one single long story that never ended, but survived generation after generation; for, when the hero grew too old, or if they had imprudently allowed him to perish, he was given a son who inherited everything from his father and who was endowed, in addition, with all the new qualities on which they set especial value at the particular moment.

Everything that made an impression on Niels

went into the story—what he saw, what he understood and what he misunderstood, what he admired and what he knew ought to be admired. As flowing water is tinged with the colour of every image that approaches its mirror, and either reflects the image in unruffled clearness or disfigures and caricatures it, either reflects it with indistinct rippling outlines or absorbs it altogether in its own colours and broken surface—so the boy's story embraced thoughts and feelings—both his own and those of others—embraced people and events, life and books as well as it could. It was like a life that he played at by the side of his real life, like a snug and secret hiding-place in which the wildest journeys could be imagined at his ease. It was like a fairy garden that opened up at the slightest hint and received him into all its splendour, to the exclusion of every one else ; above, it was roofed by whispering palms, below, through flowers of sun and starry leaves, upon tendrils of coral, a thousand paths led to all places and all times ; by one path you found yourself here, by another there—with Aladdin and Robinson Crusoe, with Vaulunder and Henrik Mag-nard, with Niels Klim and Mungo Park, with Peter Simple and Odysseus—and you only needed to wish and you were at home again.

A month after Niels' twelfth birthday two new faces appeared at Lönborggaard.

One was the new tutor's, the other, Edele Lyhne's.

The tutor, Herr Bigum, was a theological candi-

date on the threshold of the forties. He was rather small but powerfully built, with something of the strength of a beast of burden : broad-chested, high-shouldered, poke-necked. His arms were long, his legs thick and short and his feet broad. His gait was slow, heavy and emphatic ; his gestures were vague and meaningless and took up a great deal of room. He was red-bearded like a savage, fair and freckled of complexion. His broad, high forehead was as flat as a wall, with a couple of perpendicular wrinkles between the eyebrows ; his nose was short and coarse, and his mouth large, with thick fresh lips. His eyes redeemed his face ; they were bright, mild and clear, but the movements of the pupils showed that he was slightly deaf. This, however, did not prevent him from being a great lover of music and a passionate violinist ; for tones, he said, were not only heard with the ears, the whole body heard them—eyes, fingers and feet—and if a musician's ear suddenly failed him, his hand, with the strange instinct of genius, would find the right note without the ear's help. Moreover, that all audible tones were ultimately untrue, but that he to whom the gift of music had been accorded, bore within him an invisible instrument, in comparison with which the finest Cremona was but the rude calabash of the savage ; and the soul played on this instrument, ideal tones resounded from its strings, and upon it the great tone-poets had composed their immortal works. External music which pierced the air of reality and was audible to the ears, was only a miserable imitation, a faltering attempt to say the

unsayable, to be compared to the music of the soul as the statue shaped by hands, carved with the chisel, measured with the compass, was to the wonderful marble dream of the sculptor, which eyes would never see and lips never praise.

But music was by no means Herr Bigum's chief interest. In the first place, he was a philosopher. Not, however, one of those productive philosophers who discover new laws and construct systems; he laughed at their systems, these snail-shells that a man drags after him through the infinite fields of thought, fondly believing that the field is inside the snail-shell. And these laws—laws of thought, laws of nature! As if discovering a law meant anything more than giving definite expression to one's own limitations! Thus far can I see and no further, here is my horizon!—this and nothing else was what the discovery signified. For was there not a new horizon beyond the first, and another, and still another, horizon beyond horizon, law beyond law, one great infinity? He was not a philosopher of this kind. He did not consider himself conceited, nor did he believe that he overrated himself, but he could not close his eyes to the fact that his mind covered a wider field than the minds of other mortals. When he buried himself in the works of the great thinkers, he seemed to move among a crowd of mighty thoughts, slumbering giants, who, bathed in the light of his mind, awakened and felt their strength. And it was thus with everything; every fresh thought, mood or feeling that awakened in him, awakened

with his mark upon its forehead ; it came forth nobler and purer, strengthened with wings, and possessed of a greatness, a power over itself, of which its creator had never dreamed.

How often he had rejoiced almost humbly over the wonderful wealth of his soul and the self-conscious divinity of his mind ! For days came when he judged the world and the things of the world from entirely opposite points of view, when he contemplated world and things by the light of hypotheses as different from each other as night and morning, and yet no more identified himself for even one moment with these chosen standpoints and hypotheses which he had made his own, than the god who assumes the form of a bull or a swan actually becomes either animal and ceases to be a god.

And no one divined what was in him ; they all passed him blindly by ; but in his contempt for mankind he rejoiced at their blindness. The day would come when his eye would fail and the glorious edifice of his mind tremble to its foundations and fall to pieces, leaving not a trace of its existence ; but no work of his hand would be left behind, not a single jot which could manifest to the world what it had lost in him. His genius should not be thorn-crowned by an inappreciative world, but just as little should it wear the contaminating purple of the world's approval. He exulted in the thought that generation after generation would be born and die and that for long ages the greatest minds in these generations would stake their lives

to gain what he could have given them, if he had chosen to open his hand.

His insignificant position afforded him a peculiar satisfaction; for what a glorious prodigality lay in the fact that his mind was employed to teach children, what an insane incongruity that his time should be paid for with miserable daily bread, what a gigantic absurdity that he was allowed to earn this bread on the recommendation of wretched commonplace mortals who had guaranteed that he was capable of undertaking the miserable duties of a tutor!

And *he* had been plucked in the examination for his degree!

Oh, there was a strange joy in feeling oneself cast aside by the brutal stupidity of existence as worthless chaff, while emptiness and inanity were prized as golden grain; and all the time to be conscious that one's smallest thought was worth a world!

But there were also times when the isolation of his greatness lay heavy and oppressive on him.

Ah, how often, when, after having communed with himself in holy silence for hours together, he became conscious again of the life around him and found it strange and unfamiliar in its paltriness and mutability—how often he felt like that monk who listened in the cloister-wood while the bird of paradise sang a single trill and, on his return, found that a hundred years had flown! For if the monk was solitary in the midst of the strange race that lived among the graves of those he had known, how much more



so was he, whose real contemporaries were not yet born !

In such moments of desolation he could convict himself of the cowardly longing to sink down to the level of ordinary mortals and share their petty joys, to be a citizen on their great earth, a citizen in their little heaven.

But he was soon himself again.

The second guest at Lönborggaard was Fröken Edele Lyhne, Lyhne's sister. She was a young lady of twenty-six, and had lived in Copenhagen for many years, first with her mother, who, on becoming a widow, moved to the capital, and, after her mother's death, with her rich uncle, Councillor Neergaard. The Neergaards lived in great style and took a prominent part in society, so that Edele passed her time amid a whirl of balls and gaieties.

She was admired wherever she went, and envy, the faithful shadow of admiration, followed her as a matter of course. She was talked about as much as it is possible for a person to be who has not done anything wrong, and when the men discussed the three beauties of the town, there were always many voices in favour of crossing out one of the names and putting Edele Lyhne's in its place ; but they could never agree as to which of the two beauties should give way—of the third there could be no possible question.

Very young people, it is true, did not admire her ; they were a little afraid of her, and felt twice as stupid in her society as they really were, for she listened to them with a rather crushing expression.

of patience, of maliciously emphasised patience, which said plainly enough that she knew all they were saying by heart. All their endeavours to raise themselves in their own and in Edele's eyes by affecting a blasé manner, by setting up wild paradoxes, or, when their despair had reached its height, by making impudent declarations—all these attempts, crowding and jostling each other in the irrational fitfulness of youth, were greeted with the shadow of a smile, a fatal smile of recognition, which made the unfortunate youth redden and feel like the hundred and eleventh fly in the same merciless spider's web.

Besides, her beauty had neither the softness nor the glow that works so fatally on young hearts.

Over older hearts and cooler heads, on the other hand, she exercised a peculiar fascination.

She was tall.

Her thick, heavy hair was fair, and had a dull reddish glow like that of ripe wheat ; it grew low on her neck in two tapering points, which were somewhat fairer than the rest and very curly. Her light eyebrows were indistinctly marked and formed no lines on her high, clearly cut forehead. Her eyes, light grey, large and clear, were not set off by the brows, nor did the transparent eyelids throw any changing play of shadows on them. There was something indefinite and indefinable in their expression ; they always looked one straight in the face and had no infinitely varied side-glances and momentary flashes ; they seemed unnaturally wakeful, indomitable, unfathomable. All the animation was supplied by the lower half of the face, by the

nostrils, mouth and chin. The eyes only looked on. Her mouth was particularly expressive with its deep corners, clearly cut outlines and beautifully curved lips. But there was something hard in the position of the under lip, something that at times seemed to melt in her smile, at times became almost an expression of brutality.

The powerful sweep of her back and the luxuriant fulness of her figure, contrasted with the severe lines of her arms and shoulders, gave her an air of audacity, a strikingly tropical appearance, which was still further enhanced by the dazzling whiteness of her skin and the sickly blood-red of her lips. The impression she made was thus as disquieting as it was bewitching.

On the whole, there was a somewhat over-refined stylishness about her tall, slender figure, which she knew how to accentuate—especially in her ball dresses—by a resolute and conscious art; and although it was perfectly tasteful, the very fact of its bearing such open witness to her appreciation of art—in this case simply an appreciation of self—made it border a little on bad taste. It was, however, only considered an additional charm.

Nothing could be more irreproachably correct than her demeanour. Both in what she said and in what she allowed to be said to her, she kept within the bounds of the strictest prudery, and her coquetry consisted in never appearing the least coquettish, in being absolutely blind to the impression she made, and in never making the slightest difference between her admirers. But just for this very reason they

all dreamed intoxicating dreams of the face behind the mask, for this reason they believed in a fire beneath the snow and scented a breath of depravity in her innocence. None of them would have been surprised to learn that she had a secret lover, but, at the same time, none of them would have ventured a guess at his name.

Such was Edele Lyhne.

The reason why she had left the capital for Lönborggaard was that her health had suffered from the continual whirl of gaiety, the thousand and one nights of balls and masquerades. Towards the end of the winter symptoms had appeared, showing that her lungs were seriously affected, and, in consequence, the doctor had ordered her country air, rest and milk, all of which were to be found in abundance in her present place of residence. But she found an unbearable *ennui* as well, and she had not been there a week before she was longing for Copenhagen and desperately homesick. She filled letter after letter with entreaties that her exile might be brought to an end, and hinted that this longing was doing her more harm than the air did her good. But the doctor had made her relations so uneasy that they considered it their duty to turn a deaf ear to her entreaties, no matter how heart-rending.

It was not exactly the amusements she missed so sorely, but she was accustomed to hear the sound of her life gradually drowned by the noisy atmosphere of the large town, and here in the country, such a silence reigned in thought, in word, in looks—in everything,

in fact—that she was continually hearing herself with the inevitable distinctness with which we hear the ticking of a clock in a sleepless night. And to know that life was going on over there, going on just as before ! It was like being dead and, in the silence of the night, hearing strains from a ball-room die away in the air above her grave.

There was no one here to whom she could talk, for they never took up that shade of meaning in her words which alone gives life to speech. Of course they understood her, for it was Danish, but only with that dull approximation to the meaning with which we understand a foreign language we are not accustomed to hear. They never suspected to whom or to what the emphasised part of a sentence referred ; they never dreamed that this little word was a quotation, or that other, used just in that particular way, a new variation of a popular witticism. They themselves spoke with such an honest meagreness that the ribs of grammar could be felt through their phrases, and with as literal a use of words as if they had them fresh from the columns of a dictionary. The very way they said "Copenhagen" ! Sometimes in a mysterious tone, as if it were a place where little children were eaten, sometimes with a far-away sound in their voices as if it were a town in the interior of Africa, and again, in a solemn voice that vibrated with history, just as if they had said "Nineveh" or "Carthage." The parson always said "Axelstad" \* in a voice laden

\* The original name of Copenhagen. It was founded in the twelfth century by Axel, Bishop of Roeskilde.

with delightful memories, as if it were the name of one of his earliest loves. Not one of them could say "Copenhagen" so that it meant the town that extended on both sides of the Östergade and the Kongens Nytors, from the Vesterport to the Custom House.

And it was the same with everything they said and everything they did.

Nothing at Lönborggaard pleased her; these meal times regulated by the sun, this scent of lavender in drawers and wardrobes, these Spartan chairs, all this provincial furniture that clung to the walls as if it were afraid of people! Even the air was disagreeable to her; you could not go for a walk without bringing home with you in hair and clothes, as strong a perfume of meadow-hay and wild flowers as if you had been shut up in a weighing-house.

It was extremely pleasant, too, to be called Aunt, Aunt Edele.

What a sound it had!

However, she grew accustomed to it, but at first the relations between Niels and her were for this reason somewhat cool.

Niels was quite unconcerned.

But one Sunday at the beginning of August it happened that Lyhne and his wife had gone out to pay a visit, and Niels and Fröken Edele were alone at home. In the morning Edele had asked Niels to gather her a bunch of cornflowers, but he had forgotten at the time and it only occurred to him late in the afternoon as he was wandering about with

Frithiof. He gathered the flowers and ran up to the house with them.

The silence indoors made him believe that his aunt was asleep, and he stole cautiously through the different rooms. Pausing on the threshold of the sitting-room, he prepared to creep softly across to Edele's door. The room was filled with sunshine and the air was heavy with the sweet almond-perfume of a large oleander in full bloom. The only sound to be heard was a subdued splash which came occasionally from the flower-table when the gold-fish moved in their glass bowl.

Niels crept softly across the floor with his tongue between his teeth and his arms stretched out to balance himself.

Cautiously taking hold of the door-handle, which was so hot with the sun that it burnt his hand, he turned it slowly and carefully, with wrinkled forehead and half-closed eyes.

He opened the door a little and, leaning forward, laid the flowers on a chair just inside. The room was dark, as though the blinds were down, and the air seemed moist with perfume, the perfume of otto of roses.

In his bent position he saw nothing but the light matting on the floor, the wainscoting under the window and the varnished foot of a card-table, but as he straightened himself to step back, he saw his aunt.

She was stretched on the sea-green satin couch, arrayed in the fantastic costume of a gipsy. She was lying on her back with her chin raised, her throat at a

stretch and her forehead far back, and her long, loose hair flowed over the head of the couch down on to the ground. An artificial pomegranate blossom had been washed ashore on the island formed by a bronze leather shoe in the middle of the dull-gold stream.

The colours in her costume were varied but subdued. A bodice of a dull, heavy material, stamped with a gaudy pattern in dark blue, light red, grey and orange, was laced over a white silk chemisette with very loose sleeves, which fell back over her elbows. The silk had a ruddy shimmer and was sparingly interwoven with threads of red gold. The untrimmed skirt of primrose-coloured velvet was not gathered round her, but lay in loose, slanting folds over the couch. Her legs were bare from the knee down, and she had tied her crossed ankles together with a large pink coral necklace. On the floor lay an open fan, the design of which was a pack of cards arranged in a circle, and further away lay a pair of russet-brown silk stockings, one of which was rolled up, the other spread straight out, showing its shape and the red embroidery at the ankle.

At the very moment that Niels saw his aunt she also perceived him. She involuntarily made a slight movement as if to rise, but checked herself and remained as she was, only turning her head a little and looking at the boy with a questioning smile.

"Here they are," he said, going over to her with the flowers.

She stretched out her hand for them, compared with a swift glance their colour with the colours in



her costume and let them fall with a languid "Impossible!"

She stopped Niels from picking them up with a slight motion of the hand.

"Give me that," she said, pointing to a red scent-bottle that was lying on a crumpled handkerchief at her feet.

Niels went for it; he was crimson, and when he bent over the white, rounded legs and the small, narrow feet, which in their delicate form had something of the intelligence of a hand, he grew quite giddy, and as, at the same moment, one foot gave a sudden twitch, he was on the point of falling.

"Where did you gather the cornflowers?" asked Edele.

Niels pulled himself together and turned to her. "I gathered them in the pastor's rye-field," he said, in a voice which had such a strange ring that he himself was surprised at it. He handed her the scent-bottle without looking up.

Edele noticed his agitation and looked at him in surprise. Suddenly she reddened and, raising herself on one arm, drew her legs up under her skirt. "Go, go, go, go!" she said, half-vexed, half-embarrassed, at each word spraying Niels with the essence of roses.

Niels went.

When he had closed the door behind him, she let her legs slide slowly to the ground and looked down at them with curiosity.

Niels hastened through the house to his room with quick, unsteady steps. He was quite dazed,

his knees felt strangely weak and he had a feeling of suffocation in his throat. He threw himself on the sofa and closed his eyes, but he could get no rest. A strange uneasiness had taken possession of him, he breathed heavily as if in fear, and the light hurt him in spite of his closed eyelids.

Gradually there came a change ; he felt as if a warm, oppressive breath passed over him, making him helplessly languid. He had a sensation such as we have in dreams : something calls us and we are anxious to go, but it is impossible to move a foot ; we grow angry at our powerlessness, sicken with the longing to escape, and are goaded to madness by this calling which will not understand that we are bound. Niels sighed impatiently like a sick person, and looked forlornly round the room ; he had never felt so lonely and unhappy, so rejected and deserted.

Then he sat down at the window in the midst of all the sunshine and wept.

From this time forward Niels felt painfully happy in Edele's presence. She was no longer a mortal like the others, but a superior being made divine by the mystic power of a strange beauty. It made him wildly happy to gaze at her, to kneel before her in spirit and crawl to her feet in abject self-effacement ; but sometimes the craving to worship grew so strong that it had to find relief in an outward sign of subjection, and then, watching for a favourable opportunity, he stole into Edele's room and pressed a pre-arranged, interminable number of kisses on the

mat beside her bed, on her shoe, or any other relic that presented itself to his fanaticism.

He looked upon it as a great piece of good fortune that his Sunday jacket was taken for everyday wear just at this time ; for he possessed a mighty talisman in the perfume that the essence of roses had left behind—a talisman which showed him, as in a magic mirror, Edele, as he had seen her lying on the green couch, arrayed in her fancy dress. This picture was constantly turning up in the story in progress between Frithiof and him, and the unfortunate Frithiof was now never secure from barefooted princesses. If he struggled through the thickets of a primeval forest, they called to him from their liana hammocks ; if he sought shelter from the hurricane in a cavern, they rose from their beds of velvety moss and bade him welcome ; and if, blackened with powder and stained with blood, he burst the door of the pirate's cabin with a mighty stroke of his sword, he found them there also, lying on the captain's green sofa. They bored him excessively, and he could not understand in the least why they had suddenly become so necessary to the beloved heroes.

\* \* \* \* \*

However high a mortal may set his throne, however firmly he may place upon his brow the tiara of exception that signifies genius, he can never be perfectly sure that he may not some day, like King Nebuchadnezzar, be seized with the strange desire to go on all-fours and eat grass with the meanest beasts of the field.

This was what happened to Herr Bigum, when, without more ado, he fell in love with Fröken Edele. And it was to no purpose that he altered the world's history to excuse this love of his, to no purpose that he called Edele his Beatrice, his Laura, his Vittoria Colonna; for all the artificial halos with which he crowned his love were extinguished almost as quickly as he could enkindle them by the inexorable fact that he had fallen in love with Edele's beauty, that not the qualities of her mind or her heart had enslaved him, but only her elegance, her easy good-breeding and self-assurance, indeed, even her graceful impertinence. In every respect it was a love fitted to fill him with shame and astonishment at the instability of man.

And what of that? What had all these eternal truths and temporary lies, which fitted ring by ring into the chain armour that he called his convictions—what had they to say to his love? They were the strength, the marrow and the kernel of life—let them show their strength! If they proved the weaker, they must yield, if the stronger . . . . But they were broken, torn to pieces like the web of rotten threads they were. What did *she* care about eternal truths? Of what use to him were his powerful convictions? Could he win *her* with thoughts that had explored the depths of infinity? All that he possessed was worthless. Though his soul shone with a splendour a hundred times more glorious than that of the sun, what did it avail him, when hidden under the shabby covering of a Diogenes mantle? Form—form! Give me in beauty of form

my thirty pieces of silver, and take for it all that my mind contains ! Give me the figure of an Alcibiades, the mantle of a Don Juan, and the rank of a courtier !

But he had none of these, and Edele did not feel at all sympathetically inclined towards this coarse, philosophic nature which considered all the events and emotions of life in the barbaric nakedness of abstraction. In his utterances there was something offensively dogmatic, something which asserted itself with disagreeable positiveness, like the ill-timed introduction of a drum in soft music. The forced and unnatural side of his nature and his habit of always assuming a strained position before every little question—like a strong man about to throw iron balls—made him ridiculous in her eyes, and he irritated her when, impelled by his strict sense of morality, he indiscreetly robbed every delicately suggested sentiment of its incognito, rudely naming it by its right name, when in the course of conversation it wished to hurry past.

Bigum knew very well what an unfavourable impression he made and how utterly hopeless his love was, but he knew it as we know a thing when we hope with the whole strength of our soul that our knowledge is false. The miracle still remains, and even though miracles do not happen—they *might* happen. Who knows ? It may be that we are mistaken ; it may be that our reason, our instinct and our senses with their lucid clearness are leading us astray ; may be, we only need the reckless courage to follow that will-o'-the-wisp, hope, that hovers above the tumultuous longing of our

passions. It is only when we hear the door of decision slam, that the cold, iron claws of certainty implant themselves in our breast and slowly, slowly encircle with their grasp the delicate thread of hope on which our world of happiness hangs. The thread is cut ; all it sustains falls, and is shattered—and the sharp cry of despair rings out through desolate space.

As long as a doubt remains, no one despairs.

On a sunny September afternoon Edele was sitting at the top of the five or six broad, old-fashioned wooden steps that led from the garden-room down into the garden. The glass doors were wide open behind her, flung back against the bright red and green leaves of the wild vine that covered the wall. Her head was resting against the seat of a chair laden with large black portfolios, and she held an engraving before her in both hands. Coloured prints of Byzantine mosaics, in which blue and gold predominated, lay scattered over the faded green rush-matting on the landing and the oak-brown parquet floor of the garden-room. Edele was bareheaded and a white sun-hat was lying at the foot of the steps ; in her hair she had a flower of gold filigree, matching the bracelet that she wore high up her arm. Her white dress was made of a somewhat heavy material with narrow silk stripes ; it had a twisted edging of grey and orange chenille, and was trimmed with little rosettes of the same colours. On her hands she wore light mittens that reached above her elbows. They, like her shoes, were of pearl-grey silk.

The yellow sunlight filtered down on to the steps through the drooping branches of a very old ash, forming in the cool dim shade a stratum of shining lines, which filled the air around with golden dust, and painted side by side on steps, on door and wall, innumerable spots of light; everything seemed to shine by virtue of its own colour—the whiteness of Edele's white dress, the crimson of her crimson lips, the amber of her amber-coloured hair—and rise up to meet the light through a sieve of shadow. And round about her, yet a hundred other colours—blue and gold, green and red, oak-brown and mirror-like sheen.

Edele let the engraving fall and looked up, silently expressing in her hopeless glance the sigh she was too weary to utter. Then she abruptly changed her position as if she would shut out her surroundings and withdraw into herself.

At this moment Herr Bigum appeared.

Edele watched him drowsily, like a child that is too comfortable and sleepy to move, and yet too curious to close its eyes.

Herr Bigum had on his new felt hat; he was wrapped in his own thoughts and gesticulated so violently with his pinchbeck watch in his hand that the thin silver chain to which it was attached threatened every moment to give way. Suddenly he almost flung the watch into his pocket, and shaking his head impatiently, seized the collar of his coat in an irritated manner and came forward with an angry jerk of his whole body. His face was darkened with the hopeless rage that boils in a man

who flees from his own tormenting thoughts and knows that he flees in vain.

Edele's hat, which was lying at the foot of the steps and stood out white against the dark soil of the path, stayed him in his flight. He picked it up carefully with both hands, caught sight of Edele at the same moment and, while casting about for something to say, stood there holding it instead of handing it to her. He could not find an idea in his brain, not a single word would come over his lips, and he stood staring straight before him with a vacant expression of baffled penetration.

"That is a hat, Herr Bigum," remarked Edele, that she, too, might not grow embarrassed in this embarrassing silence.

"Yes," said the tutor warmly, as though delighted to hear her confirm a resemblance that had also just occurred to him; but the next moment he reddened at the stupidity of his answer.

"It was lying here," he hastened to add, "here on the ground like this—just like this," and almost happy at the relief it was to give some sign of life, no matter how paltry, he stooped down and showed her with all the meaningless circumstantiality of embarrassment, how the hat had lain. And still he stood there with it in his hand.

"Do you wish to keep it?" asked Edele.

Bigum did not know what to answer.

"I mean will you not give it to me?" she explained.

Bigum went up a few steps and handed her the hat. "Fröken Lyhne," he said, "you think . . .



you must not think, Fröken Lyhne . . . . I beg you to let me speak ; what I mean is . . . . I know I am saying nothing, but have patience with me ! I love you, Fröken Lyhne, unutterably, unutterably ; I cannot tell you how much I love you ! Oh, if there were one word that expressed the awe-struck admiration of a slave, the ecstatic smile of a martyr, and the unutterable longings of an exile for his native land—with this word I would tell you that I love you. Oh, let me speak, hear me, hear me, do not repulse me yet ! Do not think I insult you by cherishing mad hopes ; I know how insignificant I am in your eyes, how clumsy and repulsive, repulsive. I do not forget that I am poor—yes, you must know it, so poor that my mother has to live in an almshouse, *has to*, I say, I am so abjectly poor. Yes, I am only an humble servant in your brother's hire, and yet there is a world of which I am master, a world where I am powerful, proud and rich, where I am crowned with the halo of the conqueror and ennobled by the same impulse as that which impelled Prometheus to steal the fire from the heaven of the gods ; where I am brother of all the great minds that earth has borne and still bears. Oh, I understand them as only equals understand each other ; they have taken no flights so high but what my wings could bear me after them. Do you understand me ? Do you believe me ? Oh, do not believe me, it is not true ; I am only the low-born kobold that you see. It is all over ! The fearful madness of this love has lamed my wings, the eyes of my soul lose their power of vision, my heart

dries up, my soul bleeds until it is empty, bloodless with cowardice. Oh, save me from myself, do not turn disdainfully away, weep over me, weep—it is Rome that burns.”

He had sunk on his knees half-way up the steps ; he wrung his hands. His face was pale and distorted, he clenched his teeth convulsively, his eyes were bathed in tears, and his whole frame shook with pent-up sobs that were only audible in his heavy breathing.

Edele had not risen from her seat. “Control yourself!” she said with a slight touch of compassion. “Control yourself, do not give way like this ; be a man ! Listen, get up and go into the garden for a little and try to compose yourself.”

“And you cannot love me at all ?” groaned Bigum almost inaudibly. “Oh, it is terrible ! My soul contains nothing that I would not debase and murder, if, by so doing, I could win you. No, no, if madness were offered to me and if in the visions of that madness I might possess *you*, possess you, I would say, see, here is my brain, lay hold of its wonderful structure with merciless hand, tear asunder each delicate fibre that binds my personality to the glorious triumphal-car of the human mind, let me sink beneath the wheels of the car into the mire of matter and let others follow those shining paths that lead to light ! Do you understand me ? Do you realise that even if your love descended to me, robbed of all its splendour, of all the majesty of its purity, came debased, contaminated, as a caricature of love, a pale phantom, I would receive

it kneeling as though it were the consecrated Host. But my best is vanity, my worst is vanity. I call to the sun, but it does not shine, to the statue, but it does not answer. Answer! What answer is there to the fact that I suffer? No, these unspeakable torments that rend the innermost fibres of my being and this agony that only repels you, awaken in you nothing but a cold sense of affront, and in your heart you laugh to scorn the poor tutor's impossible passion."

"You are unjust, Herr Bigum," said Edele rising; Bigum also rose. "I do not laugh. You ask me if there is any hope for you and I answer no, there is no hope, and that is certainly nothing to laugh at. But let me tell you one thing. From the first moment you began to think about me you might have known what my answer would be, and you *did* know, did you not? You knew all the time and yet you spurred on all your thoughts and wishes towards the goal which you knew you could never reach. Your love does not offend me, Herr Bigum, but I condemn it. You have done what so many of us do. We close our eyes to our real life, we will not hear the 'No' it pronounces in the face of our wishes, we would forget the deep gulf it reveals to us—the gulf that lies between our longing and its object. We must have our dreams. But life has nothing to do with dreams; not a single obstacle can be dreamed away from reality, and in the end we lie wailing beside the gulf, which has not changed, but is just as it always was. It is we ourselves who have changed; for those dreams

have excited our thoughts and worked up our longing to the highest possible pitch. But the gulf has grown no narrower, and our whole being is consumed with the desire to reach the other side. But no, always no—nothing else. If only we had considered ourselves in time! But now it is too late; we are unhappy."

She paused like one awakening from a trance. Her voice had been quiet and undecided as though she were speaking to herself, but now it grew cold, hard and repellent.

"I cannot help you, Herr Bigum; to me you are none of those things you would like to be. If it makes you unhappy, you must be unhappy; if you suffer, it cannot be otherwise. Some one has to do the suffering. If we make a human being god and master of our fate, we must bow to the will of our divinity; but it is never wise to make gods for ourselves and to give our souls into the power of another, for there are gods who will never descend from their pedestal. Be sensible, Herr Bigum, your divinity is so small, so unworthy of adoration; turn from her and be happy with one of the daughters of the country."

With a faint smile on her lips, she passed through the garden-room into the house. Bigum looked after her despondently. For a quarter of an hour he paced to and fro before the steps; the words that had been spoken still rang in the air; she had only just gone, and it seemed as if a shadow of her still lingered, as if entreaties could reach her, as if everything were not yet so hopelessly at an end.

But presently the maid came out and collected the engravings, took in the chair, the portfolios, the matting—everything.

He too might go.

Niels sat at the open attic-window and gazed after him. He had heard the whole conversation from beginning to end ; his face wore an expression of terror and he shuddered nervously. For the first time he felt afraid of life ; for the first time he really understood that when life has doomed a mortal to suffer, this sentence is neither fiction nor threat—he is dragged to the rack and tortured, and no marvellous release comes at the last moment, there is no sudden awakening as from a bad dream.

And he realised this with an ominous dread at his heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

It had not been a good autumn for Edele and winter used up all her remaining strength, so that when spring came it did not even find a poor benumbed life-bud to which it could be friendly and mild and warm ; it only found a withering flower which no mildness or warmth was able to revive. But it shed its splendour on her wasting form and tenderly followed her declining strength with its balmy warmth, as the crimson of evening slowly follows the dying day.

The end came in May, on a day flooded with sunshine—one of those days when the lark is never silent and the rye seems to grow before our eyes. Outside her window stood great cherry-trees white

with blossom. Bouquets of snow, wreaths of snow, cupolas, arches, festoons—a fairy edifice of white blossoms against a background of the bluest heaven.

She felt so weak this day and yet so tranquil in her weakness—strangely tranquil; and she knew what was coming, for in the forenoon she had sent for Bigum and said good-bye to him.

Her uncle had come over from Copenhagen, and the handsome white-haired man sat by her bed the whole afternoon with his hand clasped in hers. He did not speak, but when he happened to move his hand she pressed it and looked up, and he smiled down at her. Her brother, too, was with her all the time; he gave her her medicine and made himself useful in other ways.

She lay still with her eyes closed, and pleasant pictures of her life in Copenhagen passed before her. The drooping beeches at Sorgenfri, the red church at Lyngby on its plinth of graves, and the white house with the narrow lane down to the lake, where the palings were always as green as if they were painted with moisture—all this rose up before her, grew more vivid, became indistinct, and vanished. Other pictures followed. There lay the Bredgade as the sun went down and darkness crept up slowly over the houses, and there again was the wonderful Copenhagen you found on coming in from the country in the morning. It seemed so fantastic in its bustle and sunshine, with its whitened window-panes and its streets filled with the odour of fruit; the houses looked so unreal

in the strong light, and a silence seemed to lie upon them which the noise and rolling of vehicles could not dispel. . . . Next came the warm, dark sitting-room on autumn evenings when she was dressed for the theatre and the others were not quite ready: the odour of pastils—the stove-fire casting a glow on the carpet—the raindrops beating against the panes—the horses stamping at the door—the melancholy cry of the mussel-vendor in the street . . . and after all this, the light, the music and the splendour of the theatre.

Amidst such visions the afternoon wore away.

Niels and his mother were in the sitting-room. Niels was kneeling by the sofa with his face buried in the brown velvet cushions and his hands clasped over his head; he was absorbed in his grief and wept loud and bitterly, without any attempt at self-control. Fru Lyhne sat beside him. A prayer-book open at the burial-psalms lay before her on the table. She would sometimes read a few verses, sometimes bend over her son to speak words of comfort to him or admonish him; but Niels refused to be comforted, and she could stay neither his tears nor the wild supplications of his despair.

Lyhne appeared at the door of the sick-room. He made no sign, only looked earnestly at them, and they rose and followed him in to his sister. He took their hands and led them to the bed, and Edele looked up, looked at each of them in turn, moving her lips as if to speak. Lyhne took his wife to the window and sat down beside her, while Niels threw himself on his knees at the foot of the bed.

He wept softly, and with clasped hands prayed fervently and unremittingly in a low, passionate whisper; he told God that he would not cease to hope. "I shall not leave Thee, my God, I shall not leave Thee, until Thou hast said yes. Thou must not take her from us, for Thou knowest how much we love her, Thou must not, Thou must not! Oh, I cannot say Thy will be done, for Thou wilt let her die—oh, let her live; I will thank Thee and obey Thee; I will do everything I can to please Thee, everything; I will be good and never offend Thee, if only Thou wilt let her live! Hear me, God! Oh, stop, stop, and make her well before it is too late! I will . . . . I will . . . . oh, what can I promise Thee?—Oh, I will thank Thee; never, never forget Thee; only hear me! Thou seest she is dying, Thou seest she is dying; hear me, take Thy hand away, take it away! I cannot give her up, God, I cannot; let her live—wilt Thou not, wilt Thou not? Oh, it is sinful of Thee! . . . ."

Outside before her window the white flowers grew red as roses in the light of the setting sun. Rising arch above arch, the masses of delicate blossom formed a great rose-castle, a rose-cathedral; the blue evening sky shone in with a subdued light through its airy dome, and golden lights and lights of gold with purple flames flashed out in rays of glory from the hanging garlands in this temple of flowers.

Edele lay white and still with the old man's hand in hers. Breath by breath, she slowly breathed her life away; more and more feebly rose her breast, heavier and heavier grew her eyelids.



"Greet —— Copenhagen!" was her last faint whisper.

But her last greeting was heard by no one. Not even as a breath did it cross her lips, her farewell to him, the great artist whom she had secretly loved with all her heart, but to whom she had been nothing, only a name known to his ear, only one more unfamiliar figure in the great admiring throng.

And daylight passed into bluish twilight and her hands sank feebly apart. The shadows deepened—the shadows of evening and of death.

Her uncle bent over the bed and laid his hand on her pulse, waiting in silence, and when the last trace of life had vanished, the last faint blood-wave run its course, he raised the white hand to his lips.

"Little Edele!"

## IV

THERE are people who take up their sorrow and bear it, strong natures that test their strength by the weight of the burden, while their weaker fellows abandon themselves unresistingly to grief as to the clutches of a disease. And grief takes possession of the latter like a disease, for it penetrates their innermost being, becomes one with them, and in a slow inward conflict is gradually transformed until it is absorbed in complete recovery.

But there are also people to whom grief is a deed of violence perpetrated against them, an act of cruelty which they never learn to regard as a trial or chastisement, and still less as the common fate of all. To them it seems a stroke of tyranny, something to be personally resented, and the sting always remains in their hearts.

Children do not often grieve in this way, but it was so with Niels Lyhne. It seemed to him that in the fervour of his prayers he had stood face to face with God, that he had dragged himself on his knees to the foot of the throne and courageously pleaded for a hearing, still trusting implicitly in the efficacy of prayer, although the hope within him trembled; and he had been obliged to rise from

the dust and turn away with his hope put to shame. His faith had not been able to draw down a miracle from its heaven ; no God had answered to his call ; death had pursued its prey unchecked, as if there were no power in the prayers that form our defence against fear.

A silence fell upon him.

His faith had dashed itself against the gates of heaven in its blind flight, and now it lay with broken wings on Edele's grave. For he had believed—he had had that crude, simple faith in the marvellous that children so often have. It is not the complex, subtly defined God of the catechism in whom children believe, but the mighty God of the Old Testament, who loves Adam and Eve, and to whom the whole human race, kings, prophets, and Pharaohs, are only so many good or naughty children ; that violent, fatherly God who rages with the wrath of a giant and is bounteous with the bounty of a giant ; who has no sooner created life than He sets death on its track ; who drowns His earth in waters from His heaven ; who thunders down laws which are too severe for the race He has created, and who, in the time of the Emperor Augustus, has compassion, and sends His Son to die in order that the law may be broken and yet kept. It is to this God, who always answers with a miracle, that children speak when they pray. But the day comes when they understand that in the earthquake which shook Golgotha and burst the graves, His voice was heard for the last time, and now that the curtain of His Holy of Holies is rent

asunder, it is the God Jesus who reigns ; and from this day on they pray differently.

But Niels was not yet so far.

He had, it is true, followed Jesus on His earthly career with all reverence, but His constant subordination to the Father, His unimposing presence and His human sufferings had obscured His divinity. Niels had only seen in Him one who did God's will, only God's Son, not God Himself, and, therefore, he had prayed to God the Father, and God the Father had deserted him in his utmost need. But if God had turned from him, he, too, could turn from God. If God had no ear for his prayers, then he had no lips to utter them ; had God no mercy, he had no homage and respect, and he defied God and cast him out of his heart.

On the day that Edele was buried, he kicked the earth of the grave contemptuously every time the pastor used the Lord's name, and when he subsequently met with it in books or on the lips of other people, he wrinkled his childish forehead rebelliously. When he went to bed at night, a wonderful feeling of deserted greatness awakened in him, as he thought how at this time every one, children and grown people, prayed to God and closed their eyes in His name, while he alone refused to fold his hands in prayer, he alone denied God his homage. He was cut off from the protection of heaven ; no angel watched at his side ; solitary and unprotected, he drifted about on the strangely murmuring waters of darkness, and solitude gathered round him, forming ever-widening circles about his bed. But still he did not pray ;

although his longing rose even to the verge of tears, he uttered no cry.

And so it remained all his life, for he defiantly freed himself from the point of view to which his early training had bound him, and fled with his sympathy to the side where they stood who had vainly spent their strength in kicking against the pricks.

In the books he had been given to read and in what he had been taught, God and His chosen people and ideas always swept along in a victorious triumphal procession; and he had joined in this exultation, carried away by the happy sense of belonging to the proud legions of the conquerors. For is not victory always just, and is not the conquering hero the liberator, the leader and the bringer of light?

But now his exultation was mute, now he was silent and thought with the thoughts of the conquered, felt with the hearts of the vanquished. He realised that a defeated cause is not necessarily bad because the victorious cause is good, and he took sides and said that the former was the better, felt that it was the greater, and called the conquering power violent and tyrannical. He took sides—as far as he was able—against God, but like a vassal who takes up arms against his lawful master, for he still believed and could not scorn away his faith.

His teacher, Herr Bigum, was not the man to help back a lost soul. On the contrary, his philosophic temperament, which *all* sides of a thing could

inspire—to-day this, to-morrow the opposite—set all dogmas agoing in the minds of his pupils. He was really a man of Christian principles, and if it had been possible to make him give a decided opinion as to what he considered firm ground amid all these shifting surroundings, he would probably have said that it was the belief and doctrines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, or, at any rate, something similar. But, as it was, he was ill-fitted to lead his pupils along the clearly defined path of Church faith, and to call to them at every step, that by the slightest deviation from this path they would be on the road of lying and darkness that led to the destruction of their souls and to hell; for he was utterly deficient in the passionate solicitude of orthodoxy for jots and tittles. His religion was of that somewhat artistic and studied kind that people of his attainments allow themselves; they are not afraid of a little harmonising, and are easily betrayed into half-involuntary perversions and alterations, because in everything, without exception, they lay chief stress on their own personality and, in whatever spheres they fly, must at all costs hear the rushing of the wings of their own mind.

Such people do not lead their pupils, but there is a fulness, a variety, a somewhat wavering versatility in their instruction which, when it does not confuse the pupil, develops his independence to a high degree and almost forces him to have an opinion of his own. For children are never satisfied with anything vague or uncertain, but, from a certain instinct of self-preservation, always demand a plain yes or no,

a for or against, that they may know which road to take with their hate and which with their love.

Thus no firm and unquestionable authority is at hand to lead Niels back, perpetually pointing out the way to him and clenching his convictions. He has taken the bit between his teeth and follows every new path that opens up before him, provided it leads away from what has until now been the home of his thoughts and feelings.

He is conscious of a new strength in seeing with his own eyes and choosing with his own heart ; he is helping to form himself, and so much that is fresh springs up in his mind, so many unsuspected and scattered sides of his nature combine to form a rational whole. It is an exciting time of discovery, when, little by little, in fear, in uncertain triumph and incredulous happiness, he discovers himself. For the first time he sees that he is not like other people ; a mental bashfulness awakens in him and makes him shy, reticent and embarrassed. He is suspicious of all questions, and finds allusions to his innermost thoughts and feelings in everything that is said. Because *he* has learnt to read his own nature, he believes that every one else can read what is written in him, and he avoids the society of his elders and wanders about alone. People have suddenly grown strangely obtrusive. He has a slight feeling of enmity towards them as towards beings of a different race, and in his solitude he passes them in review and examines them critically and sternly. Formerly, the names father, mother, the pastor, the miller, were a perfectly satisfactory

explanation. The name had completely hidden the person from him. The pastor was the pastor, and there was nothing more to say on the subject. But now he saw that the pastor was a lively little man who, at home, was as quiet and unobtrusive as possible in order to escape his wife's notice, while elsewhere, he tried to forget his domestic yoke by talking himself into a transport of rebellion and mutinous violence.

So much for the pastor.

And Herr Bigum ?

In that hour of passion in the garden Niels had seen him ready to sacrifice everything for Edele's love; he had heard him deny himself and the soul within him, and now he was always talking of the Olympic calm of the philosopher as opposed to the vague whirlwinds and mist-born rainbows of life. How painfully contemptible it appeared to the boy, and how wakeful and vigilant his doubts became! He did not know that what Herr Bigum called by a disparaging name in other people was christened differently when it concerned himself, and that the Olympic calm with which he regarded the things that agitated other mortals, was the disdainful smile of a Titan—a smile laden with memories of a Titan's passions and a Titan's desires.



## V

Six months after Edele's death one of Lyhne's cousins lost her husband, a potter, named Refstrup. The business had never been prosperous, the husband's long illness had still further impaired it, and there was not much between the widow and poverty. Seven children were more than she could provide for. The two youngest and the eldest, who was already helping in the factory, remained with her, and her relations took the rest. The Lyhnes got the second eldest boy ; his name was Erik, he was fourteen years old and had held a scholarship at the public Grammar School. Now Herr Bigum was to teach him together with Niels and Frithiof Petersen, the pastor's son.

He did not pursue his studies very willingly, for he wished to be a sculptor. His father had said it was nonsense, but Lyhne had nothing against it and he believed the boy had talent. Still, he wished him to spend some years in study first, so that he would always have something to fall back upon, and besides, a classical education was necessary for a sculptor, or, at any rate, strongly to be recommended. There the matter rested for the present, and Erik had to console himself with the very fair collection

of good engravings and handsome bronzes to be found at Lönborggaard. It was, at all events, a great thing for one who until now had only seen the rubbish bequeathed to the public library by a bone-carver, whose taste was more eccentric than artistic, and Erik was soon busy with pencil and chisel. No one attracted him so much as Guido Reni, who in those days, as a matter of fact, had a higher reputation than Raphael and the greatest masters; and perhaps nothing is more likely to open young eyes to the beauties of a work of art than the knowledge that their admiration is justified in its highest flights. Andrea del Sarto, Parmegianino and Luini, who were to be so much to him, by-and-bye, when he and his talent had come to an understanding, left him indifferent now, while the audacity of Tintoretto, and the bitterness of Salvator Rosa and Carravaggio carried him away. For very young people do not appreciate the sweet element in art; the most delicate miniature-painter has set out in the footsteps of Buonarrotti, the most charming lyric poet made his first voyage with black sails, in the blood of tragedy.

But as yet he did not take art very seriously; although rather better than other games, it was still only a game, and he was no prouder of modelling a head or carving a horse successfully than he was of hitting the weathercock on the church-steeple with a stone, or of swimming over to Sønderhagen and back without a rest. For he liked all games that demanded agility, strength, endurance, a steady hand and a sure eye, not games like Niels' and

Frithiof's in which fancy played the chief part and where the action and its successful issue were only imaginary. However, they soon forsook their old pursuits to follow Erik. The books were thrown aside and the interminable story met with a rather violent end at a last secret meeting in the hay-loft ; deep silence reigned over its hastily thrown-up grave, for they did not wish to tell Erik about it. They had not known him many days before they felt that he would laugh at both their story and themselves, lower them in their own eyes and make them feel ashamed. And he had the power to do this, being quite free from anything like dreaminess, exaltation or extravagance. The perfect soundness of his practical boyish reason made him ridicule all mental infirmities as readily and as mercilessly as children generally ridicule physical ones ; Niels and Frithiof were consequently afraid of him and endeavoured to imitate him, denying much and concealing more. Niels, in particular, was quick to suppress everything about himself that was not of Erik's world, and with all the zeal of a renegade he teased and derided Frithiof, whose slower and more steadfast nature could not, all at once, forget the old for the new. But jealousy had the chief share in urging Niels to this unkind behaviour, for, at their very first meeting, he had fallen in love with Erik, who, shy, cool and half disdainful, only submitted to be loved with reluctance.

Is there in all the later relations of life a tenderer, nobler and more intense feeling than the passionate yet so bashful love of one boy for

another? It is a love that never speaks, never dares to find relief in a caress, a look or a word; an observant love that grieves bitterly over every fault and defect in the loved object; a love that is longing, admiration and self-forgetfulness, that is pride, humility, and peaceful happiness.

Erik only remained a year, or a year and a half, at Lönborggaard, for, while on a visit to Copenhagen, Lyhne spoke to one of the leading sculptors there and showed him the boy's sketches, and Mikkelsen, the sculptor, said they showed talent, and that book-learning was waste of time; not much classical education was needed to find a Greek name for a naked figure. It was therefore decided that Erik was to be sent over immediately to attend the Academy and work in Mikkelsen's studio.

The last afternoon Niels and Erik were up in their room. Niels was looking at pictures in a penny magazine. Erik was deep in Spengler's descriptive catalogue of the picture-gallery at Christiansborg. How often he had turned the pages of this book and tried to form an idea of the paintings from its naïve descriptions, almost sick, meanwhile, with longing actually to behold all this art and beauty, to enjoy and drink in all this wealth of line and colour with his own eyes that through admiration it might become his! And how often, too, he had shut the book, weary of staring into the fantastic driving mist of words that refused to remain steady, to take shape, or to produce anything, and only seethed and rushed past in vague, misleading confusion!

But to-day it was different ; to-day he had the certainty that they would soon be something more to him than shadows from dreamland. He felt rich already in all that the book promised ; the pictures took shape as never before, emerging in transient flashes, like bright-coloured suns from a golden mist, a mist of dancing gold.

"What are you looking at ?" he said to Niels.

Niels showed him a picture of Lassen, the hero of the second of April.

"How ugly he is !" said Erik.

"Ugly ! He was a hero—would you call *him* ugly too ?"

Niels had turned back to the picture of a great poet.

"Dreadfully ugly !" Erik assured him, screwing up his mouth. "What a nose ! And his mouth and eyes, and all that straggling hair round his head !"

Niels *saw* that he was ugly, and was silent ; it had never occurred to him that greatness is not always cast in a beautiful mould.

"It's true," said Erik, shutting his Spengler. "While I think of it, here's the key of the deck-house."

Niels made a melancholy gesture of resistance, but Erik hung round his neck a little key on a broad piece of tape. "Shall we go down ?" he asked.

They went. They found Frithiof lying under the garden hedge ; he was eating unripe gooseberries and had tears in his eyes at the prospect of

the approaching parting. Besides, he felt aggrieved that they had not sought him out before ; it is true, he was in the habit of coming of his own accord, but he thought that on such a day as this some ceremony should be observed. He silently held out a handful of green gooseberries to them, but they had had their favourite dinner and were dainty.

"Sour !" said Erik, with a shudder.

"Unwholesome things !" added Niels, superciliously looking down at the proffered berries ; "how can you ? Throw the rubbish away, we are going down to the deck-house." And he pointed to the key with his chin, for his hands were in his pockets.

All three went down together.

The deck-house was an old green ship's-cabin that had once been bought at a beach-auction. It stood down by the fjord and had served as a store-house when the embankment was being made, but now it was no longer in use, and the boys had taken possession of it. They kept their boats, cross-bows, leaping-poles and other treasures there, and especially such forbidden but indispensable things as gunpowder, tobacco, and matches.

Niels opened the door of the deck-house with an air of gloomy solemnity, and they entered and searched for their things in the dark nooks of the empty cabin.

"Do you know what !" said Erik with his head in a remote corner, "I shall blow mine up."

"Mine and Frithiof's, too !" answered Niels, accompanying his words with a solemn gesture.

"No, indeed, not mine," cried Frithiof, "or what shall I have left to sail when Erik has gone?"

"True enough," said Niels, turning away contemptuously.

Frithiof felt rather uncomfortable, but when the others had gone out he removed his boats to a safe hiding-place.

They soon laid the powder in the vessels in nests of tarred tow, then set the sails, arranged the fuses, fired them and sprang back. They ran along the beach, signalling to the crew and loudly explaining to each other the accidental turns and movements of the ships as the result of the nautical knowledge of their brave captains.

But the boats came ashore at the point without the desired explosion having taken place, and Frithiof had the opportunity of nobly sacrificing the wadding of his cap for the manufacture of new and better matches.

The ships bore down full sail on the reefs of Zealand; the heavy British frigates made for land in an impenetrable line, while the light foam frothed under the black bows and the sharp reports of the bow-pieces filled the air. Nearer and nearer. Blue and red light and golden flashes gleamed from the stately prows of the "Albion" and the "Conqueror"; the grey masses of sails hid the horizon, and the smoke, pouring forth in white clouds, was driven as mist over the glittering waves. Then with a faint report the deck of Erik's boat was blown into the air, the tow caught fire, a red blaze burst forth and the nimble flames ran up the shrouds

and along to the rigging ; they slowly worked their way among the bolt-ropes and, like flashes of lightning, dashed into the canvas, which crumpled and shrunk as it burnt, flying far over the sea in large, black flakes. The Danish flag still waved from the slender point of the tall mizzen-mast ; the flag-line was burnt, and it fluttered wildly and beat about with its red wings, as if eager for the fray. An instant later the flame had seized it and set it ablaze, and the lifeless ship, now blackened with smoke, without helm or helmsman, drifted aimlessly about—a plaything for the winds and the breaking waves. Niels' boat would not burn like this ; the powder had ignited and the smoke poured out, but that was all and it was not enough.

"Sink her, my men !" cried Niels from the point. "Point the starboard cannon through the aft-hatchways and give her a broadside !" At the same time he stooped for a stone. "All right, fire !" and the stone flew from his hand.

Erik and Frithiof were not behindhand, and the hull was soon in splinters. A similar fate befell what remained of Erik's boat.

The fragments were brought ashore, for now there was to be a bonfire.

They were piled up with dry seaweed and withered grass, and were soon a burning, smoking mass, in which the little pebbles that were in the seaweed burst and crackled with the strong heat.

For some time the boys sat silent round the fire, but suddenly Niels, who was as gloomy as ever, sprang up and fetched all his things from the deck-



house, and, breaking them in pieces, threw them into the fire. Erik fetched his and Frithiof also brought something. The flames of this sacrificial pile rose so high that Erik was afraid they would be seen from the fields and began to put out the fire with wet seaweed, but Niels stood still, gazing sorrowfully at the smoke as it curled down the beach. Frithiof kept further back and hummed a heroic song to himself, which, now and then, when unobserved, he accompanied with wild, bard-like snatches in the strings of an invisible harp.

At last the fire went out and Erik and Frithiof set off home, while Niels remained behind to lock the deck-house. When that was done, he looked cautiously round after the others and then threw key and tape far out into the fjord. Erik happening to turn at the same moment, saw them fall, but hastily looked away and began to run a race with Frithiof.

Next day he left Lönborggaard.

At first he was sadly missed, bitterly missed, for, to the two who were left, everything seemed to come to a standstill. Life had gradually taken shape on the hypothesis that there were three to live it. Three were company, variety and diversity ; two were solitude and nothing at all.

What in all the world could two do with themselves ?

Could two have a shooting match ? Could two play at ball ? They might certainly be Friday and Robinson Crusoe, but who would be the savages ?

What Sundays! Niels was so weary of his existence that he began to rub up his geographical knowledge and then, with the help of Herr Bigum's large atlas, to extend it far beyond its prescribed limits. Finally he commenced to read the Bible straight through and to keep a diary. Frithiof, under this total desertion, sought a degrading consolation in playing with his sisters.

But gradually the past grew less vivid and their regrets less poignant; they returned occasionally on a quiet evening when the setting sun shone on the walls of the lonely room and the distant monotonous note of the cuckoo suddenly ceased, leaving the silence deeper than before. Then the old longing wakened and cast its shadow over the soul, making everything distasteful; but it was too vague to be painful any longer, and it weighed so lightly that it had something of the sweetness of a vanishing pain.

It was the same with the letters. At first they were filled with complaints, questions and wishes loosely strung together, but, by degrees, they grew longer and reported external matters of interest. Finally, the style improved, they were neatly written, and betrayed a certain pleasure their authors took in being able to write so well.

As was natural, many things sprang up again which had not dared to raise their heads while Erik was there. Imagination shook down its showy flowers into the dreary monotony of their uneventful lives; their minds were enveloped in an atmosphere of dreams, heavy with the stimulating yet destruc-

tive perfume of life—a perfume in which is hid the subtle poison of an anticipation thirsting for experience.

Thus Niels grows up, and all the impressions of childhood have their share in moulding the soft clay of his nature ; everything helps, everything is of importance—his life, his dreams, his actual knowledge and his dim forebodings—all leave light but sure lines upon it, lines which the future will retrace, deepen, make fainter, and finally erase.

## VI

"HERR LYHNE—Fru Boye ; Herr Frithiof Petersen—Fru Boye."

It was Erik who made these introductions, and they took place in Mikkelsen's studio, a large, light room, over twenty feet high, with a hard clay floor and several doors, two on one side of the room leading to the street, and those on the opposite wall to the small studios behind. Everything in the room was grey with the dust of clay, gypsum and marble ; it had made the cobwebs on the ceiling as coarse as twine, and drawn river-maps on the large window-panes. It lay thick in the eyes, mouth and nose, in the curls, drapery and prominent muscles of the numerous casts, set out on broad shelves that ran round the whole room like a frieze of the destruction of Jerusalem. Even the laurel-trees in the corner by the door, the high laurel-trees in their large tubs, were greyer than grey olives.

Erik, in his working blouse, with a paper cap on his dark, curly head, stood modelling in the centre of the studio. He had a moustache now, and looked very manly compared with his friends, who were pale and tired with study and examinations ; there was, too, a provincial air of correctness about

their bran-new clothes, their close-cropped heads and capacious caps.

Fru Boye sat at a little distance from Erik's scaffolding on a low, straight-backed, wooden chair, with a handsome book in one hand and a lump of clay in the other. She was small, rather small, and a light brunette, with clear brown eyes and a white skin that turned to dusky gold in the shadowy curves of her throat and neck. This harmonised well with her dark glossy hair, which took on a tinge of bronzed fairness in the light.

She was laughing when they arrived. Her laugh was as long and hearty, as merry and frank as a child's; her eyes, too, had all the confidence of a child, and an open smile played about her mouth, which was the more child-like because the upper lip was short and the milk-white teeth were hardly ever hidden; her mouth was always slightly open.

But she was no child.

Was she over thirty?

Neither her full-formed chin nor the ripe crimson of her under-lip denied the fact. Her figure was full, with rich, firm lines, which were strongly accentuated by a tight-fitting dark blue dress that outlined her waist, bust and arms like a riding-habit. In rich folds about her neck and shoulders lay a blood-red silk scarf, the ends of which disappeared in the pointed opening of her dress; in her hair she wore carnations of the same colour as the scarf.

"I am afraid we are interrupting you in your reading," said Frithiof, with a glance at the handsome book.

"Oh no, not in the least. We have been quarrelling for the last hour over what we have read," answered Fru Boye, looking at Frithiof with large, searching eyes. "Herr Refstrup is such an idealist in all matters of art, and I grow so weary of hearing about the raw reality that has to be purified and clarified and reborn and whatever else they call it, until at last nothing is left. Do me the favour of looking at that Bacchante of Mikkelsen's, which deaf Traffelini is copying. Now, if I had to describe that in a catalogue . . . . Good Heavens ! No. 77. A young lady in *negligé* stands in a meditative attitude and does not know what to do with a bunch of grapes. She ought to squeeze the grapes, if I might advise her, squeeze them hard, so that the red juice would run down her breast. Eh ? What ? Am I not right ?" and in childlike ardour she seized Frithiof's arm and almost shook it.

"Well, yes," admitted Frithiof; "yes, I should say so, too, it lacks—freshness—spontaneity——"

"Oh, it is naturalness that is wanting. Dear me ! *why* can we not be natural ? Oh, I know what it is, we haven't the courage ! Neither artists nor poets have courage to know man as he really is. Shakespeare had, though."

"Yes," said Erik, behind his figure, "but, you know, I can't get on with Shakespeare ; he does too much, I think ; he runs you round, until at last you don't know what is what."

"I wouldn't say that," Frithiof objected reproachfully ; "but," he added, with an apologetic smile,

"I really cannot admit the Berserk fury of the great English poet to be the genuine, conscious, artistic spirit."

"Can you not? Oh dear! How funny you are!" and she laughed as heartily as she could, as she rose and walked down the studio. Suddenly she turned round, and stretching out her arms towards Frithiof, exclaimed, "God bless you!" at the same time bending almost to the ground with laughter.

Frithiof was all but offended; but it would make so much fuss to leave in anger, besides, of course, he had been perfectly right in what he said, and then, too, the lady was very pretty. So he stayed and entered into conversation with Erik, and with his thoughts still running on Fru Boye, strove to throw a tone of tolerant superiority into his voice.

Meanwhile, she strolled about the further end of the studio and hummed thoughtfully to herself, now striking up a quick laughter-like trill, now passing slowly into a solemn recitative.

On a large wooden box stood the head of a young Augustus; she wiped the dust off it, and, taking some clay, ornamented the head with a moustache and beard, and put rings in its ears.

While she was thus occupied, Niels approached her on the pretence of examining the casts on the shelves. She did not turn her eyes in his direction, but yet she must have known he was near, for, without looking round, she stretched out her hand and asked him to get Erik's hat.

Niels placed the hat in her outstretched hand,

and taking it, she put it on the head of the Augustus.

"Old Shakespeare!" she said tenderly, stroking the cheek of the travestied bust. "Stupid old fellow, who didn't know what he was about! Did he just sit there and dip his pen into the ink—eh?—and dash off the mind of a Hamlet without thinking what he was doing?" She lifted the hat from the head of the bust and passed her hand over its forehead in a motherly fashion, as if she would stroke the hair back out of its eyes. "Happy old fellow, all the same! Lucky old poet! For you must confess, Herr Lyhne, that this Shakespeare was not altogether an unsuccessful writer!"

"I have my *own* opinion of the man," answered Niels, reddening and rather offended.

"What! You, too, have an opinion of Shakespeare! What do you say then? Are you for us or against us?" And she laughingly took up her position beside the bust and put her arm round its neck.

"I cannot say whether the opinion that you are surprised to hear I possess is fortunate enough to acquire some importance by coinciding with yours; still, I think we may say it is *for* you and your *protégé*. At any rate, my opinion is that he knew what he was doing, weighed what he was doing, and dared to do what he did. Many a time he ventured it in doubt, and the doubt is still visible; many a time, too, he only ventured half-way, and with new ideas wiped out what he did not dare to leave as it stood. . . ."



And so he talked on.

As he spoke, Fru Boye became more and more restless ; she looked nervously first to one side and then to the other, and played impatiently with her fingers, while her face grew dark with an expression of trouble and even of suffering.

At last she could contain herself no longer.

"Do not forget what you were going to say ! " she said. " But please, Herr Lyhne, leave off doing that with your hand—that movement as if you were going to draw teeth. Please, leave off. And, now, do not let me disturb you, I am all attention again ; besides, I quite agree with you."

"Well, then, there is no need to say more."

"Why ? "

"Well, if we agree."

"Yes, if we agree ! "

Neither of them meant anything particular by the last few words, but they said them with a significant emphasis, as if a world of delicate meaning were hidden in them, and they looked at each other with an ingenious smile on their lips—a lingering gleam of the understanding that had just flickered up—while each reflected as to what the other could have meant, both feeling a little vexed at being so dull of comprehension.

They slowly joined the others, and Fru Boye sat down again on her low chair. Erik and Frithiof had talked each other tired and were glad of fresh company. Frithiof immediately approached the lady and made himself very agreeable, while Erik, as host, kept modestly in the background.

"If I were curious," said Frithiof, "I should ask the name of the book about which you and Refstrup were disputing when we arrived."

"Do you ask?" said Fru Boye.

"I do."

"Ergo?"

"Ergo!" answered Frithiof with a humble bow of acquiescence.

Fru Boye held up the book and announced solemnly, "'Helge,' Oehlenschläger's 'Helge'—And which canto we were at?—The one where 'The Mermaid visits King Helge.'—And which verse?—Where Tangkjaer has lain down by Helge's side, and he, no longer able to restrain his curiosity, turns round

. . . . and lo!

Two rounded, snowy arms descried—  
The greatest beauty earth can show  
Was slumbering at his side.

The dusky mantle fallen away  
No more the maiden's charms concealed  
A fluttering gauze like silver spray  
Her lovely limbs revealed.

And that is all we are shown of the mermaid's beauty, and I was dissatisfied with it. What I want is a luxuriant and glowing description; I want to see something so dazzlingly beautiful that it will take away my breath. I want to be initiated into the peculiar beauty of such a sea-nymph's body, and what, I ask you, can I make out of white arms and lovely limbs veiled in a piece of gauze?—What

indeed !—No, she ought to be naked as a wave, and the wild beauty of the sea must be embodied in her. Her skin must have something of the phosphorescence of the summer sea, her hair something of the black, tangled horror of seaweed-forests. Yes, the countless hues of the water must come and go unceasingly in the sparkling of her eyes ; her pale breast must be cool with a voluptuous coolness ; the waves ripple their soothing course through all her limbs, the irresistible power of the maelstrom is in her kiss, and her outstretched arms are as soft as the billows' foam."

She had talked herself quite warm and, still excited over her subject, stood looking at her young listeners with large, questioning, childlike eyes.

But they said nothing. Niels was scarlet and Erik extremely embarrassed. Frithiof was quite carried away and stared at her with undisguised admiration, and yet he was the one who least understood how bewitchingly beautiful she was, as she stood before them framed in her words.

Before many weeks had passed, Niels and Frithiof were as much at home in Fru Boye's house as Erik Refstrup was. Here, besides a pale niece of Fru Boye's, they met a large number of embryo poets, painters, actors and architects—artists more by virtue of their youth than their talent—who were all hopeful and courageous, eager for the fray, and very easily inspired. Among them, it is true, were one or two of those quiet dreamers who bleat mourn-

fully for the vanished ideals of a vanished age, but the greater number were imbued with the spirit of the time, intoxicated with modern theories, dazzled with the morning light, and carried away by the force of new ideas. They were modern, bitterly modern, modern to exaggeration, and all the more so, perhaps, because they bore within them a strange, instinctive longing that had to be stifled, a longing which no new ideas could satisfy, however colossal, far-reaching, all-powerful and all-enlightening.

But all the same, their young souls were filled with tempestuous exaltation, with faith in the light of the great stars of thought, and with hopes as infinite as the sea ; enthusiasm bore them aloft, as on the wings of an eagle, and their hearts grew big with unquenchable courage.

In after years, of course, life wore this out and reduced most of it to silence ; prudence helped to break it down and cowardice, perhaps, bore away the fragments—but what of that ? Well-spent time cannot return to be ill-spent, and nothing in after-life can wither a day or blot out an hour of the life that has once been lived.

The world wore quite a different aspect for Niels in these days. To hear his vague and secret thoughts clearly expressed by ten different pairs of lips ! To see his own strange opinions, which even to himself were like a hazy landscape with misty outlines, subdued tones and uncertain depths ; to see this landscape without a veil, in the crude, sharp colours of daylight, revealed in all its details, intersected by roads which were crowded with people—

there was something very strange in seeing his fantastic thoughts become so real.

He was no longer a solitary child-king, ruling over lands that only existed in his imagination ; no, he was one of the multitude, a man in the multitude, a soldier in the service of the Idea, of the new age. He had a sword in his hand and a banner went before him.

What a marvellous time of promise that was ! How strange to hear the indistinct, mysterious whispers of his soul sounding through the air of reality like the shrill challenging tones of a horn, like the crashing of clubs on temple walls, the whizzing of David's stone against Goliath's skull, or a victorious peal of trumpets ! It was like hearing himself talk in foreign tongues with strange lucidness and power about those things that lay nearest to his heart.

Not only from the lips of those of his own age rang forth the new gospel of dissolution and reconstruction ; but older people, too, men whose names carried some weight, were alive to the glorious ideas of the new time. They expressed themselves more broadly than the younger men and interpreted things more seriously ; names from vanished centuries were in their train, and history was on their side, universal history, the history of the human mind, the *Odyssey* of thought. They were men who, in their youth, had been seized in the same way as these young enthusiasts and could testify to the spirit with which the latter were filled. When, however, they had become aware from the

sound of their own voices that they were alone—as a cry in the desert convinces us of our solitude—they were struck dumb. But the younger ones, remembering only that these men had once spoken, overlooked their subsequent silence and stood ready with laurel wreaths and martyrs' crowns, willing to admire, happy in admiring. And they for whom the admiration was intended did not disdain this tardy appreciation, but wore the crowns in all good faith, assumed an air of historical significance, romanced away all that was not strictly heroic in their past, and declaimed the convictions which had been cooled down by an unpropitious age, with all the fervour of old.

Niels Lyhne's relations in Copenhagen, especially the old Councillor and his wife, were not at all pleased with the associates the young student had chosen. It was not so much the new ideas that caused them anxiety, as the fact that some of the young men considered long hair, high riding-boots and a slight slovenliness to be of service to their views; and although Niels was not a fanatic in this respect, still it was unpleasant for them to meet him, and still more unpleasant that their acquaintances should meet him in the company of youths of this type. However, this was only a trifle compared to his intimacy with Fru Boye, and his attendance on her and her pale niece at the theatre.

Not that anything definite could be said against Fru Boye.

But she was talked about.

In many respects.

She belonged to a family called Konneroy, and the Konneroy's were one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in the whole town. Nevertheless, she had quarrelled with them. Some said on account of a dissolute brother who had been sent out to the colonies. It was certain, however, that the breach was complete, and it was even whispered that old Konneroy had cursed her, and afterwards had an attack of his worst spring asthma.

All this happened after she was left a widow.

Boye, her husband, was a pharmacist, an *assessor pharmacie*, and had been knighted. When he died he was sixty years of age, and the possessor of over twenty thousand pounds. As far as was known, they had lived very happily together. For the first three years the elderly man had been deeply in love, but later on they went their separate ways; he was occupied with his garden and with maintaining his reputation as a great man in men's society, she with the theatre, romantic music and German poetry.

Then he died.

When the year of mourning was over, the widow took a journey to Italy and remained there for a few years—chiefly in Rome. There was positively no more truth in the rumour that she had smoked opium in a French club than in the report that she had been modelled in the same way as Paulina Borghese; and it is extremely unlikely that the little Russian prince who shot himself in Naples while she was there did the deed on her account.

But it was a fact that the German artists were never weary of serenading her, and it was also true that one morning, in the costume of an Albanian peasant girl, she had seated herself on the steps of a church in the Via Sistina and been engaged by an artist, who was a newcomer, to stand as a model, with a pitcher on her head and a little brown boy at her side. At all events, a picture of this description was hanging on her wall.

On her way home from Italy she met a fellow-countryman, an able and well-known critic, who would rather have been a poet. He was said to be of a negative, sceptical nature, with a keen intellect, which handled his fellow-mortals roughly and mercilessly, but, as he treated himself in exactly the same manner, he considered this brutality justifiable. But he was not quite what people made him out to be. He was neither so uniformly unpleasant nor so ruthlessly consistent as it seemed, for although he waged continual war against the ideal tendency of the times and spoke deprecatingly of it, yet at heart he was more in sympathy with all that was ideal, dreamy and éthereal, with the intense blue of mysticism, with inconceivable sublimity and unattainable purity, than he was with the more earth-born tendencies for which he did battle and in which, for the most part, he believed.

He fell in love with Fru Boye in spite of himself, but he did not tell her so, for it was not the frank and hopeful love of youth. He loved her as a being of a finer and happier race than his own, and there



was, in consequence, a touch of resentment in his love, an instinctive animosity towards everything about her that was a mark of race.

He regarded her inclinations and opinions, her tastes and sentiments, with jealous and hostile eyes ; he fought for her with every weapon at his disposal—persuasive eloquence and heartless logic, rough authority and compassionate derision—and finally, he won her for himself and his opinions. But when truth had conquered and she had become as he was, he saw that too much was gained, and that he had loved her with all her illusions and prejudices, her dreams and her errors, and not as she was now.

Dissatisfied with himself, with her, and with everything at home, he went away and did not return.

And she had just begun to love him !

People could make a great deal out of this affair and they naturally did so. Fru Neergaard spoke of it to Niels, as ancient virtue speaks of youthful errors, but Niels took it up in a way that both offended and frightened her, for, in reply, he talked loudly about the tyranny of society and the freedom of the individual, about the plebeian integrity of the multitude and the nobility of passion.

From this day forward he seldom visited his anxious relatives, but Fru Boye saw him oftener than before.

## VII

It was a spring evening ; the sun was setting and filled the room with red light. The arms of the windmill on the embankment chased their shadows over the window-panes and the walls of the room ; they came and went, light and shade following each other at regular intervals—one moment of shadow, two of light.

Niels sat at the window, gazing at the conflagration of the clouds through the bronze-coloured elms on the embankment. He had been outside the town, under budding beeches, in green rice-fields and meadows gay with flowers ; everything had been so light and clear, the sky so blue, the Sound so bright, and the ladies he had met so remarkably pretty. He had gone down the forest path singing to himself, but soon the words were left out of his song, then the rhythm was forgotten, lastly the notes died away and the intensity of the silence made him dizzy. He closed his eyes, but still felt as if the light were permeating him and sparkling through all his nerves ; and with each breath, the cool, intoxicating air increased the strange excitement of his blood and sent it rushing more and more violently through quivering veins, powerless to stem the flood. He

felt as if all that was swarming, sprouting and budding around him—all the nascent life of spring—strove in some mysterious way to concentrate itself in him in one long, loud cry. He thirsted for this cry, and listened for it until his listening took the form of a vague, tumultuous longing.

And now as he sat here at the window, this longing returned anew.

He longed for a thousand quivering dreams, for visions of refreshing delicacy—light colours, fleeting perfumes, and soft music from silver strings, strained to their utmost tension—and then, for silence, to pierce the innermost heart of silence, whither no air-wave ever bore the smallest wreck of sound, but where, in the quiet glow of red colours and the lingering warmth of fiery perfumes, everything is steeped in deathlike repose. He did not long for this, but the idea arose and enveloped all else until he turned from it and set his own thoughts free again.

He was tired of himself, of his cold thoughts and the fancies of his brain. Life a poem ! Not when you went about trying to make your life into poetry instead of living it. How empty it was, how empty and void ! This hunting after yourself with a sharp eye on your own trail—in a circle, of course ! This pretence of throwing yourself into the stream of life, and forthwith sitting down and angling for yourself, and fishing yourself out in some curious disguise or other ! If only everything would come to him—life, love, passion—but in such a way that its poetry would be master of him, not he of it !

He made an involuntary gesture of self-defence. At heart he was really afraid of this power called passion; this tempest that whirled away like withered leaves all the settled and established ideas that man had acquired! It was distasteful to him. This raging flame, that was extinguished by its own smoke. . . . No, *he* would burn slowly.

And yet it was pitiable—this life at half-speed, in still waters, with the coast in sight. Oh, that tide and storm would come! If he only knew how, all his sails should be set for a voyage to the Spanish Main of life. Farewell to days that slowly trickled by, farewell to brief moments of happiness! Farewell, ye languid moods that shone only when polished with poetry, and to you, ye tepid feelings that were clad in warm dreams and yet froze to death! Go where ye will! I steer for a strand where moods twine round the fibres of the heart like rank creepers—a luxuriant forest; for each withered creeper there are twenty in blossom, and for each in blossom, a hundred in bud.

If I were only there!

He grew weary with his longing and sick of himself. He needed company. But he had already been with Frithiof in the forenoon; Erik, of course, was not at home, and it was too late to go to the theatre.

All the same, he went out and sauntered disconsolately about the streets.

Would Fru Boye be at home? She did not receive to-night, and it was rather late.

Should he call and see?

Fru Boye was at home.

She was alone at home. The spring air had made her too tired to go to a dinner-party with her niece; she had preferred to lie on the sofa, drink strong tea and read Heine; but she had had enough poetry now and felt inclined to play lotto.

So they played lotto.

Fifteen, twenty, seventy-seven, a long list of numbers, the rattling of the wooden discs in the bag and an irritating sound of balls rolling on the floor of the flat above them.

"This is not interesting," said Fru Boye, when they had covered no numbers for a long time. "Is it? No!" she answered herself, shaking her head despondently. "But what else can we play?"

She folded her hands on the discs before her, and looked at Niels with a hopeless glance of inquiry.

Niels really did not know.

"Now don't say music!"

She bent her face down to her hands and touched her clasped fingers with her lips, one knuckle after the other, right along the row and back again.

"Nothing could be more detestable than this existence," she said, looking up. "One never by any chance comes in the way of a single new experience, and the scraps that life casts off are not enough to keep one going. Do you not feel that too?"

"Well, I can really suggest nothing better than to do as the Caliph in the Arabian Nights. Your silk dressing-gown will do; you have only to twist a white scarf round your head, I to borrow your

large Indian shawl, and we might pass remarkably well for a couple of merchants from Mossul."

"And what should we two unfortunate merchants do with ourselves?"

"Go down to the bridge, hire a boat for twenty gold pieces, and sail away up the dark river."

"Past the sand-boxes?"

"Yes, with coloured lamps on the mast."

"Like Ganem, the slave of love.—How well I recognise your whole train of thought! It is so like a man to build up scenery and situations with all possible haste, and, amid all these external effects, to leave out the main point. Have you never noticed how infinitely less imaginative we women are than you men? We cannot anticipate pleasure in our imaginations or expel sorrow from our lives by means of a fanciful consolation. What is, is. Imagination!—It is so woefully little. Yes, when people are as old as I am, they sometimes content themselves with the pitiful comedy of dreams. But they never, never should!"

She languidly changed her position on the sofa, and, half lying, half sitting, rested her chin on her hand and her elbow on the cushions.

Her glance wandered dreamily round the room and she seemed lost in gloomy thoughts.

Niels was silent, too, and it grew very still. The restless hopping of the canary was audible, the clock ticked more and more loudly in the stillness, and a string in the open piano gave way with a sudden snap, its long dying tone blending with the soft singing of the silence.

She looked so young as she lay there in the dim, yellow light of the astral lamp, which illumined her from head to foot, and there was a bewitching incongruity between the beautiful, full throat, the matronly Charlotte Corday cap, and the confiding, childlike eyes and small open mouth with its milk-white teeth.

Niels gazed at her in admiration.

"How strange it is to long for oneself!" she said, slowly rousing herself from her reverie and recalling her wandering glance. "I long so often, so very often, for myself as I was when a young girl; I love this girl as some one with whom I was very intimate, with whom I shared life, happiness and everything I had, and then lost, without being able to raise a finger to save her. What a delightful time that was! You cannot realise how pure and delicate a girl's life is until the time of her first love. It could only be expressed in music; but think of it as a festival, a festival in a fairy palace, where the air glitters like red-tinged silver. It is full of cool flowers which change their colour—slowly interchange colours with one another—there is a sound of subdued exultation everywhere, the dawning presentiments glitter and glow like mystic wine in wonderful dream-goblets, and all is music and fragrance; innumerable perfumes penetrate the halls—oh, I could weep when I think of it, and when I think, too, that if a miracle restored everything to me just as it was, such a life could no longer support me; I should fall through it like a cow trying to dance on cobwebs."

"Not at all," said Niels, warmly; and his voice trembled as he continued: "No, you could love in a far more refined and spiritual way than the young girl."

"Spiritual! How I hate this spiritual love! Only artificial flowers spring from the soil of such a love; they do not even grow, they are taken from the head and stuck in the heart, because the heart has no flowers of its own. The very reason that I envy a young girl is that there is nothing spurious about her; she does not mix the makeshift of imagination in the goblet of her love. Do not think that because her love is interwoven and overshadowed by visions and pictures of vague luxuriance that she cares more for her fancies than the earth on which she treads; it is only because all her senses, instincts and faculties seek love everywhere—everywhere, and she never grows weary. But she does not revel in her fancies or even find rest in them; no, she is too practical for that, so much so that many a time in her unconscious way she becomes innocently cynical. You cannot realise, for instance, what an intoxicating pleasure a young girl finds in secretly inhaling the smell of cigar-smoke that clings to her lover's clothes; it is a thousand times more to her than any conflagration of her imagination. I despise imagination. What is the use, when our whole being craves for another's heart, of only being admitted into the cold ante-chamber of imagination? And how often it happens! How often we have to make the best of it, when the man we love decks us out in his



imagination, sets a halo round our head, fastens wings to our shoulders and swathes us in a starry garment, only finding us worthy of his love when we wander about in this fancy costume ! None of us can be really natural in it, for we are overdressed, and it confuses us when people throw themselves in the dust and worship us, instead of taking us as we are and merely loving us."

Niels was quite bewildered ; he had picked up her handkerchief, which she had dropped, and intoxicated himself with its perfume and, being at this moment lost in the contemplation of her hand, he was by no means prepared for the impatient questioning glance she gave him. However, he managed to reply that he thought the strongest proof of the greatness of a man's love was that he had to justify this unspeakable love for a fellow-creature by surrounding her with a halo of divinity.

"Yes, that is just what is so insulting," said Fru Boye ; "we are divine enough as we are."

Niels smiled complacently.

"No, you must not smile ; it is no laughing matter. On the contrary, it is very serious, for this adoration is absolutely tyrannic in its fanaticism. We are compelled to adapt ourselves to man's ideal. Eradicate and destroy everything in us that does not harmonise with his ideal conception ; it must be got rid of ; if it cannot be suppressed, it must be overlooked, systematically forgotten and denied all chance of development. But what is not properly our own, what is foreign to our natures, is forced into the most luxuriant bloom by being lauded to

the skies, by the constant assumption that we possess it in the highest degree, and by being made the head and corner-stone on which man's love is built. I call it an outrage upon our nature. I call it drill. Man's love is a course of drill. And we submit to it; even those whom no one loves submit—contemptible weaklings that we are!"

She rose from her recumbent position and looked threateningly across at Niels.

"If I were beautiful—oh, I mean bewitchingly beautiful, lovelier than any woman that ever lived, so that all who saw me were smitten, as if by magic, with the anguish of unquenchable love—how I should compel them by the power of my beauty to adore, not their traditional, bloodless ideal, but me, myself, as I lived and moved, every single inch of me, every corner of my being and every spark of my nature!"

She had risen from her seat and Niels thought of going, but he lingered, revolving in his mind several audacious remarks which, however, he did not dare to put into words. At last, taking courage, he seized her hand and kissed it, but she offered him her other hand, too, and he got out nothing more than "Good night."

Niels Lyhne had fallen in love with Fru Boye, and he was happy.

As he went home through the same streets in which he had wandered about despondently earlier in the evening, it seemed to him as if ages had passed since he was here. Since then his gait and bearing had acquired a certain confidence and quiet

dignity, and, as he carefully buttoned his gloves, he did so under the impression that a great change had taken place within him, and with the half-conscious feeling that this change made it incumbent on him to button his gloves—carefully.

Too busy with his thoughts for sleep, he went up on to the embankment.

His mind seemed strangely tranquil, and he marvelled at this calm, but did not exactly believe in it; it seemed as if from the innermost depths of his being bubbles were rising noiselessly but incessantly, as if something were seething and fermenting—but far, far away. He felt as though he were waiting for something to come from afar, for the approach of distant music which, swelling gradually from a faint hum to a tumultuous rush of sound, would crash down upon him, seize him he knew not how, bear him he knew not whither, come like a flood, break like the surf and then——

But now he was calm; except for that quivering music in the distance, all was clear and peaceful.

He loved; he said aloud to himself that he loved. Many times. The words had a strangely dignified sound, and they meant so much. They meant that he was no longer a prisoner in the power of all the fantastic influences of his childhood, that he was no longer the plaything of aimless longings and misty dreams; he had escaped from that fairyland which had grown up with him and around him, encircling him with a hundred arms and holding his eyes to, with a hundred hands. He had wrenched himself from its grasp and become his own master; though

it stretched out its hands after him, imploring with silent glances and beckoning with white garments, its power was dead—a dream that day had slain, a mist dispersed by the sun. For was not his young love day, and sun, and the whole world? Had he not until now been strutting about in purple that was still unspun? Had he not been majestic upon a throne that was not yet erected? But now he stood upon a high mountain, looking over the wide plain of the world, a world parched for song, where as yet he had no place, where he was neither anticipated nor expected. He exulted in the thought that no whiff of his breath had stirred a leaf or ruffled a wave in this vast infinity. All was his to gain. And he knew that he could, he felt confident of success, and strong as only *he* can feel who still bears all his songs unsung in his breast.

The mild spring air was full of fragrance; not saturated with it as a summer night sometimes is, but, so to speak, streaked with it—with the spicy balsam-odour of young poplars, the refreshing breath of late violets and the sweet almond-fragrance of the bird-cherry. All these perfumes came and went, blending and separating, flaring up one moment, going out the next or dissolving slowly in the night air. And fleeting moods, like shadows cast by the perfumes in their fitful dance, chased one another through his mind. And as his senses dallied with the odours that came and went as they listed, so, too, his mind craved in vain to be borne away in silent flight on the gently beating wings of a mood; but a mood is no bird with powerful wings—only

down and feathers at the mercy of the winds, falling like snow and vanishing.

He tried to picture her lying on the sofa<sup>a</sup> talking to him, but he was unsuccessful. He saw her going down an avenue, saw her sitting reading with her hat on, just about to turn over one of the large white pages of the book which she held between her gloved fingers, then turning over page after page. He saw her getting into her carriage in the evening after the theatre and nodding to him through the window ; then the carriage drove off and he stood looking after it ; it went on and on, and still he kept it in sight. People to whom he was indifferent came up and addressed him ; forms he had not seen for years went down the street, turned and looked at him—and still the carriage went on ; he could neither get rid of it nor call up other pictures while it was there. And just as he was growing nervous with impatience, the longed-for vision came—the yellow light, her eyes, her mouth, her chin upon her hand, as plainly as if she were before him in the darkness.

How lovely she was, how gentle and pure ! He loved her and knelt to her in passionate longing ; he begged at her feet for all this dazzling beauty. Descend from your throne to me ! Make yourself my slave ; lay the chains of slavery about your neck with your own hands—but not in play ! Each limb must be obedient when I pull the chain, and the spirit of the slave be in your eyes. If I could only bring you to my feet with a love-potion—no, not a love-potion, for that would compel you and

you would obey its power involuntarily, whereas I alone must be master, *I* must receive the will that lies broken in your humbly outstretched hands. You should be my queen and I your slave, but my slave's foot would rest on your proud queen's neck. What I ask is not madness, for if being proud and strong and submissive is not a woman's love, *I* know it is love to be weak and yet to rule.

He felt that he would never be able to attract that element in her nature which gave to her beauty its soul of voluptuousness, fire and sensuous softness ; it would never let these dazzling Juno-arms embrace him, never in a moment of passionate weakness surrender that voluptuous neck to his kiss. He saw well enough that he could win the young girl in her, indeed, that he had already won her, and he was certain that she, the ripe beauty, had felt this young self that was dead within her move mysteriously in its living grave to embrace him with slender, girlish arms and kiss him with timid, girlish lips. But this was not his love. He only loved what he could not win, loved just that neck with its warm, blossom-like whiteness, and its gleam of dewy gold beneath the dark hair. He sobbed in the intensity of his longing and wringing his hands at the sense of his powerlessness, threw his arms round a tree, laid his cheek against the bark and wept.

## VIII

IN Niels Lyhne's character was a certain paralysing discretion, child of an instinctive aversion to daring, and grandchild of a dim consciousness that he was lacking in individuality. Against this characteristic he waged continual war, now inciting himself against it by heaping it with abusive epithets, now endeavouring to deck it out as a virtue which was intimately bound up with his own natural self, indeed, even more, which really decided what he was and of what he was capable. But whatever he made of it and however he regarded it, he hated it as a secret infirmity, which he could never conceal from himself, however well he hid it from the world ; it was always there to humiliate him whenever he was at one with himself. How he envied at such moments that self-confident indiscretion which is never at a loss for words that are equivalent to actions and are followed by consequences, consequences to which it does not give a thought until they are at its heels ! People of this sort seemed to him like centaurs, man and horse in one, thought and leap simultaneous, whereas he was divided into rider and horse, the thought being one thing, the leap something quite different.

When he imagined himself confessing his love to Fru Boye—and he always had to imagine everything—he saw himself most distinctly in this situation ; he saw all his movements, his bearing, and his whole figure from the front, the sides, and the back ; he saw himself growing unsteady with the fever that always paralysed him in action and robbed him of his presence of mind. There he stood and received his answer like a blow across the knees, instead of like a shuttlecock that might be sent back in all possible ways and still return in a different manner.

He thought of speaking and he thought of writing, but he never succeeded in saying it straight out. He only hinted at it in ambiguous declarations, or else, in a half-feigned tone of lyric passion, pretended to be carried away by glowing words of love and extravagant desires. But, nevertheless, an intimacy gradually sprang up between them, a strange intimacy, which had its birth in a young man's humble love, in a dreamer's ardent and fanciful longings, and in a woman's wish to be desired, although romantically unattainable ; and this intimacy gradually took the form of a myth which arose, neither of them knew how, the pale, silent myth of a beautiful woman who, in her youth, had loved a master-spirit who had gone forth to die forgotten and deserted in a distant land. And the beautiful woman had mourned for many a long year, but her sorrow was unsuspected, for only solitude was sacred enough to witness her grief. Then came a youth who called the departed hero his master, who was



imbued with his spirit and inspired by his work. And he loved the sorrowing woman. To her it seemed as if dead, happy days rose from their graves and haunted her ; a strange, sweet confusion lay over everything, and past and present blended into a dim, silver-veiled dream-day, in which she loved the youth half as himself, half as the shadow of another, and gave him half her soul. But he was obliged to tread softly lest the dream should vanish, and rigorously bar out all hot, earthly desires, lest they should disperse the soft twilight and awaken her to grief again.

Under cover of this myth their intimacy gradually assumed a more and more definite form. They said "thou" to each other and called each other by their Christian names—Niels and Tema—when they were alone ; and the niece's presence was restricted as much as possible. It is true that Niels tried, now and then, to break down the recognised barriers, but Fru Boye had so much the upper hand that she could quell these attempts at rebellion with ease, and Niels soon gave in and submitted again for a time to this fantasy of love with its living pictures. Their intimacy neither passed into platonic dulness nor sank to rest beneath the monotony of custom. There was no question of rest. Niels Lyhne's hopes never grew weary, and, although they were gently repulsed every time they eagerly blazed up, they only burned the more fiercely in secret. How skilfully they were kept alive, too, by Fru Boye's innumerable acts of coquetry, by her fascinating artlessness, and by the barefaced courage

with which she talked about the most difficult subjects! Besides, the game was, by no means, entirely in her own hands, for it sometimes happened that her blood in moments of idleness dreamed of rewarding this half-tamed passion, of lavishly heaping it with all the ecstasy of love, in order to feast upon its wondering joy. But a dream like this was not easy to disperse, and when Niels came, she was attacked by a guilty nervousness, by the humility that waits on conscious wrong-doing, and by a bewitching bashfulness that made the air strangely heavy with love.

Yet another thing that endowed the intimacy with a peculiar buoyancy, was that Niels Lyhne's love was so strong and manly that he chivalrously abstained from taking in imagination what reality denied him, and even in this side-world, where everything obeyed his bidding, respected Fru Boye as if she were actually present.

Thus the intimacy was well supported on both sides and there was no imminent danger ahead of its falling to pieces. It seemed made, too, for a nature like Niels Lyhne's—dreamy and yet thirsting for life—and even if it were only a pastime, it was a very real one, and enough to give him a basis of passion for subsequent self-development.

And that was what he needed.

For Niels Lyhne was to be a poet, and the outward conditions of his life had, in themselves, been such as to lead his inclinations in this direction and concentrate his faculties on the task. Until now, however, he had had little more than his dreams as

a basis for his poetry, and nothing is more uniform and monotonous than imagination, for, in the ever-changing land of dreams that seems to us so infinite, there are, in reality, certain short, beaten tracks, along which all journey and beyond which they never stray. People may be very different from one another, but their dreams are always similar, for, in them, without fail, they possess the three or four things they desire, and, no matter whether these things become theirs at once or only gradually, completely or imperfectly, they always get them all; no one really goes empty-handed in his own imagination. For this reason no one discovers himself in his dreams or becomes conscious of his individuality, for the dream knows nothing of *how* we are content to win our treasures, how we give them up when lost, how we grow satiated after enjoyment, which path we take when we mourn our loss.

Hence, until now Niels Lyhne's poetry had been, in general, the fruit of an æsthetic personality which found spring a time of buds, the sea great, love erotic and death melancholy. He had advanced no further in the art of poetry than to be able to string verses together. But now things assumed a different aspect. Now that he courted a woman's favour and wished her to love him, him, Niels Lyhne of Lönborggaard, who was twenty-three years old, who stooped a little, had well-formed hands and small ears and was inclined to despondency, who wanted her to love him and not the idealised Nicholas of her dreams, with his haughty gait, his

easy manners and his advantage in point of years—now he began to take a lively interest in this Niels whom he had hitherto treated like a friend that one prefers to keep in the background. He had been too busy adorning himself with what he lacked to have time to observe what he already possessed, but now, with all the enthusiasm of a discoverer, he began to piece himself together from the memories and impressions of his childhood and the most vivid moments of his life. He saw with glad surprise how it all fitted together, piece by piece, uniting to form a personality that was familiar to him, although different from the one he had pursued in his dreams—a personality that was genuine after a different fashion, and strong and capable withal. It was no longer the dead stump of an ideal; the wondrous, elusive shades of life played upon it in ever-changing and unending succession, blending to form an infinitely varied whole. Great Heavens! Why, he *had* powers which could be used just as they were; he *was* Aladdin—there was nothing he had reached to the clouds for, that had not dropped upon his turban.\*

And now began a happy time for Niels, that happy time when the mighty centrifugal force of development sends us forward rejoicing over the dead points in our nature. Everything in us grows and increases to such an extent that, in an excess of strength, we are ready to resist mountains with our shoulders, and we build away bravely at a Tower of Babel that is some day to reach the sky.

\* See Oehlenschläger's "Aladdin," Act i. sc. 4.

In the end, however, it only becomes the unsightly stump of a colossus, and we spend the rest of our life making additions to it in the shape of hopeless turrets and extraordinary projections.

Everything seemed transformed; nature, faculties and work acted upon each other like the pinions of a machine. There was no question of pausing to enjoy his art, for, as soon as a thing was finished, it was cast aside; he outgrew it as he worked upon it; it was only a step that led up towards the ever receding goal, one of many steps—traversed roads that were forgotten even while they echoed with his tread.

But while new strength and fresh thoughts thus bore him on towards maturer and broader views, he was thrown more and more upon himself. One friend and companion after another slipped away and did not return; his interest in them gradually died out, for he found it day by day more difficult to see an appreciable difference between these members of the opposition and the majority which they opposed. In his eyes everything connected with them formed one great, distasteful mass of tediousness. What did they write when they sounded the charge? Pessimistic poems about dogs being more faithful than men, and prisoners often more honest than many that were at liberty; eloquent odes on the superiority of green woods and brown heaths to dusty towns; descriptions of the virtues of the poor and the burdens of the rich, of the blood of nature and the bloodlessness of civilisation; comedies on the folly of old age and the

higher rights of youth. How easily satisfied they were with what they wrote ! And even more so with their own conversation, especially when held within four safe walls.

No, when he was ready there should be music—trumpets ! . . . .

With his old friends, too, things were no longer as they had been. Especially with Frithiof. The truth is that Frithiof, who was of a positive nature and had a good head for systems and a broad back for dogmas, had been studying Heiberg and taking all he said for gospel truth, unconscious of the fact that systematists are clever people who concoct their systems from their works and not their works from their systems. And it is a fact that young people who get into the clutches of a system easily become great dogmatists, owing to the praiseworthy love that youth usually bears to all ready-made conditions, to all that is absolute and established. And when, in this way, we become possessors of the whole truth, the only genuine truth, it would be unpardonable to keep it to ourselves and let our less fortunate fellow-mortals go their own crooked way, instead of guiding them and teaching them, instead of, like a friendly gardener, seizing their wayward shoots with tender mercilessness, fastening them to the wall and marking out the lines they must follow, if, at some future day, they are to be able, as artistic espaliers, to thank us for all the trouble we have taken with them.

Niels always said, to be sure, that he valued nothing more highly than criticism, but, all the

same, he was more partial to admiration, and he could not submit to be criticised by Frithiof, whom he had always regarded as his own peculiar property, and who, too, had always been delighted to wear the livery of his opinions and convictions. And now he came and tried to play the equal in the self-chosen disguise of a surplice! Of course this had to be put down, and Niels first tried, with an air of good-natured superiority, to make Frithiof feel ridiculous. Failing in this, he took refuge in barefaced paradoxes which he scornfully refused to discuss, merely marshalling them in all their grotesque enormity and then retreating in irritating silence.

Thus they grew apart.

With regard to Erik, things went better. There had always been a touch of reserve, a kind of spiritual shyness, in their boyish friendship, and they had thereby avoided that extreme intimacy which is so peculiarly fatal to friendship. They had shared mutual enthusiasms in the state apartments of their souls, and talked cosily and confidentially in the sitting-rooms, but they had never gone in and out of the bedrooms, bathrooms and other out-of-the-way places in the mansions of their souls.

It was the same even yet; the reserve was, if anything, rather greater—on Niels' part at all events—but the friendship had not diminished on that account, and its head and corner-stone, as of old, was Niels Lyhne's admiration for the intrepidity, spirit and easy self-assurance that Erik displayed, and for the promptness with which he seized and

appropriated all that came in his way. But Niels could not conceal from himself that the friendship was grievously one-sided. Not that Erik was of an unfriendly disposition, or because he had no faith in Niels—on the contrary, no one could have a higher opinion of Niels than Erik; he looked upon him as so completely his superior in the matter of natural gifts, that criticism was out of the question, but in the same breath with this indiscriminate appreciation, he maintained that both Niels' work and the bent of his mind were far removed from the horizon that was visible to his own eyes. He was convinced that Niels would master the path he had chosen, but he was certain that he himself had nothing to do upon that path, and, therefore, did not turn his steps in that direction.

Now this was rather hard upon Niels, for although Erik's ideals were not his, and although he was not in sympathy with the tendency of Erik's art, which inclined towards the romantic or rather the sentimental-romantic, yet he was capable of fostering a deep and comprehensive sympathy with which to follow faithfully his friend's development, rejoicing with him when he made progress and helping him with encouragement when he stood still.

In this respect the friendship was one-sided, and it was not surprising that, just at this time, when the rapidity of his spiritual growth made the need of companionship and comprehensive sympathy doubly strong, Niels' eyes should be opened to its inadequacy. In his bitterness he began to look a little



more sharply at the friend he had hitherto judged so leniently, and a depressing sense of desolation crept over him ; it seemed as if everything that he had brought with him from home, from bygone days, fell away from him and left him forgotten and deserted. The door leading to the past was closed, and he stood outside, empty-handed and alone ; he must gain for himself all that he needed and desired—new friends and new comforts, new memories and new love.

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For about a year, Fru Boye was Niels Lyhne's only real companion. Then one day he received a letter from his mother, informing him that his father was dangerously ill and recalling him to Lönborgsgaard.

When he arrived his father was dead.

It weighed almost as heavily as a crime upon Niels' mind that he had missed his home so little during the last few years. He had been there often enough in thought, but only as a guest, with the dust of other countries upon his clothes and the memories of other places in his heart ; he had never yearned for it with a nameless longing as the bright sanctuary of his life, craving to tarry beneath its roof or to kiss the ground on which it stood. He regretted now that he had been faithless to his home, and, weighed down with grief, his remorse was deepened by the feeling that in some mysterious way he was partly to blame for what had happened, that his faithlessness had hastened the death. He wondered how he could have been content to live

away from this home which now attracted him with such a strange power. He clung to it with every fibre of his being, in infinite longing and regret, uneasy lest he should find it impossible to harmonise with it as perfectly as he desired, unhappy because the countless memories, which called to him from every bush and nook, from sounds and fleeting moods, from innumerable perfumes and from the silence itself—because all these memories called to him in voices too faint to be heard as clearly and distinctly as he longed to hear them; they only whispered to his soul like the rustling of leaves that have fallen to the ground, like the murmur of waves flowing on and on. . . .

Happy in his grief is he who, when a beloved one goes hence, only needs to weep over his loss and the blank that remains; for bitterer far are the tears that have to atone for our want of love to the dead in days gone by, a want for which no amends can be made. For now everything comes back to us; not only hard words, deliberately spiteful answers, pitiless blame and unreasoning anger, but sharp thoughts that were never put into words, hasty judgments that flashed through the mind, the silent shrug of the shoulders and the unseen smile of mingled scorn and impatience; they all return to us like poisoned arrows, driving their heads deep into our breast—their blunted heads, for the points broke off in the heart that is now silent. It is silent, and no amends can be made, absolutely none. There is love enough in our breast now, but now it is too late. We seek the cold grave with over-

flowing hearts : are we the nearer to our lost one ? We plant flowers and weave garlands : does that lessen the distance between us ?

The mourners at Lönborggaard also wove garlands ; to them, too, came the bitter memories of moments when love had grown silent before harsher voices, and they, too, were filled with remorse at the sight of the stern lines round the closed mouth of the grave.

It was a time of gloom and bitterness, but one good result sprang from it : it drew mother and son closer together than they had been for many a year. For although they loved each other dearly, they were always on their guard in each other's presence, and their intercourse was overshadowed by an element of reserve which dated from the time when Niels grew too big to sit on his mother's knee. *He* was afraid of the impetuous and exaggerated side of *her* nature, while his despondency and hesitation made an unpleasant impression upon her. But now life with its ups and downs and varying moods, had prepared their hearts to belong wholly to one another.

Scarcely two months after the funeral, Fru Lyhne took seriously ill, and for some time her life was in danger. The anxiety of these weeks drove their former sorrow into the background, and when Fru Lyhne began to recover, it seemed to both her and Niels as if years had pushed in between them and the new-made grave. To Fru Lyhne, in particular, it seemed long ago, for all through her illness she had been certain that she was dying, and had

suffered much from her fear of death ; even now that she was recovering and the doctor had declared all danger over, she could not get rid of these gloomy thoughts.

It was indeed a dreary convalescence. Her strength only returned by slow degrees and, so to speak, reluctantly, and in place of a mild and soothing drowsiness, she was overcome by a restless languor, accompanied by a depressing sense of weakness, and a perpetual, despondent craving for strength.

At length a change took place and her strength increased more rapidly, but the conviction that her life was drawing to a close still clung to her, lying like a shadow upon her, and holding her prisoner in the toils of a restless melancholy.

One evening during this time she was sitting alone in the garden-room, looking out through the open folding-doors.

The trees in the garden hid the golden glow of the sunset ; only in a single place was a fiery red patch visible through the trunks, forming a sun whose deep golden, sparkling beams wakened green tints and bronze reflections upon the dark masses of foliage.

High above the restless tree-tops the clouds swept gloomily across the heavy red sky, dropping in their flight little shreds of cloud, small narrow strips, which the sun saturated with a wine-red glow.

Fru Lyhne sat listening to the whistling of the blast, keeping time with faint movements of her

head to the irregular rising and sinking of the gusts as they swept along, spent their strength, and died away. But her thoughts were far away, further than the clouds at which she gazed. She sat there pale and wan in her widow's garb, with a painful expression of restlessness about her white lips ; her hands, too, were restless and toyed with the small thick book upon her lap. It was Rousseau's "Heloïse." Other books were lying about her : Schiller, Staffeldt, Evald, and Novalis, and large volumes of engravings of old churches, ruins and mountain-lakes.

Suddenly a door inside was opened, steps were heard in the next room and Niels entered. He had been for a long walk by the fjord. The fresh air had coloured his cheeks and the wind still seemed to linger in his hair.

Outside, in the sky, blue-grey colours had gained the ascendancy, and heavy raindrops began to beat against the panes.

Niels told her how high the waves had risen, how much seaweed had been washed up on the beach, what he had seen and whom he had met, and as he talked he collected the books, shut the folding-doors and fastened the windows. Then he sat down on a stool at his mother's feet, and taking her hand in his, leaned his cheek against her knee.

By this time it was quite dark outside, and the rain was pelting in fitful torrents against panes and casements.

"Do you remember," said Niels after a long silence, "do you remember how often we used to

sit like this in the twilight and go forth in quest of adventures, while father was busy in his office with Jens the steward, and maid Duysen rattled the tea-things in the dining-room? And how, when the lamp came, we would both awaken from our wonderful stories to the cosiness around us! I well remember, though, I never believed that the story came to an end on that account, but always thought of it advancing towards its dénouement away among the hills towards Ringkjøbing."

He did not see his mother's sad smile; he only felt her hand pass lightly over his hair.

"Do you remember," she said, a little while afterwards, "how often you promised me that, when you grew up, you would sail away in a great ship and bring me home all the splendours of the world?"

"Do I remember? There were to be hyacinths because you were so fond of hyacinths, and palms like the one that died, and columns of marble and gold. There were always so many columns in your stories. Do you remember?"

"I have waited for the ship—no, be still, my son, you do not understand me—it was not for myself, it was the ship of your fortune. . . . I hoped that life would be generous to you with its riches and distinction, that you would follow resplendent paths—fame . . . everything—no, not exactly, only that you would take part in the battle for all that is highest; I do not know how, but I was so tired of everyday happiness and everyday ideals. Do you understand what I mean?"

"You wanted me to be a Sunday-child, mother dear ; one who does not pull in the same yoke with others, who has a heaven of his own to be happy in, and his own place of damnation too. There were to be flowers on board, weren't there—rich flowers to strew over the poverty-stricken world? But the ship was long in coming, and Niels and his mother remained the needy pair they had always been. Eh?"

"Have I pained you, my son? They were only dreams ; do not mind them!"

Niels was silent for a long time ; he felt ashamed of what he was going to say.

"Mother," he said, "we are not so poor as you think. Some day the ship *will* come. . . . If you would only believe that or have faith in me. . . . Mother, I am a poet—yes, indeed—with all my soul. Do not think this mere vanity or childish dreaming. If you knew how humbly and impersonally I say it, if you knew the pride and gratitude with which I think of all that is best in me, or could feel my modest joy at being able to assure you of it, your faith in me would be as implicit as I desire. Dear, dear mother! I *shall* help to fight in the noblest causes, and I promise you that I will never yield, that I will always be true to myself and to what is in me. The best of everything shall only just be good enough for me and no more—no compromise, mother! If I feel that what I have formed is not sterling, if I hear that it has crack or flaw—into the melting-pot with it again ; my best or nothing every time! Do

you realise that I *must* make this promise? The gratitude for all my wealth impels me; you must accept it, and it will be a crime against you and against our highest ideals if I break my word. For it is you whom I have to thank for the aspirations of my soul; did not your dreams and your longings foster the growth of my talents, and what but your sympathies and your ceaseless craving for beauty consecrated me to what is to be the work of my life?"

Fru Lyhne wept in silence. She felt herself growing pale with happiness.

She laid both hands tenderly on her son's head, and he drew them softly to his lips and kissed them.

"You have made me so happy, Niels. . . . I feel now that my life has been something more than one long useless sigh; it has borne you forward, just as I fervently hoped and dreamed it would—dreamed, ah, how often! And yet, there is a sadness in my joy, Niels; for to see my dearest wish fulfilled, the wish of so many years . . . such things only happen when life is near its close."

"You must not talk like that; I won't have it. Everything is going on so well, mother dear. Why, you are growing stronger every day!"

"I do not want to die," she sighed to herself. "Do you know what I thought about in those long sleepless nights when death was so frightfully near? . . . What seemed to me harder than anything, was that there were so many great and beautiful things in the world I should die without having seen.



I thought of the infinite number of souls they had rejoiced and refreshed and filled with new life, while for me they have had no existence, and when my soul flutters hence on languid wings, it will not bear away, as a glorious memory, one golden reflection of the splendour of its native land. It has only sat in the chimney-corner and listened to tales of the wonderful earth. No one can imagine, Niels, what unspeakable misery it is to lie imprisoned in the oppressive twilight of a sick-room, striving with a feverish brain to picture to oneself the beauty of unknown places—snow-clad Alpine peaks above blue-black lakes, sparkling rivers between vineyards and chains of forest-clad hills crowned with ruins, lofty halls and marble gods—and never to be successful, to have to give it up in despair every time, only to begin all over again, because it is so infinitely hard to say farewell without having had the least share in it all. . . . Ah, Niels, to long like this for something with your whole soul, while you feel that you are gradually approaching the threshold of another world, to stand on this threshold and look wistfully back, while you are being steadily forced through the gate that leads whither not the faintest of your longings impels you. . . . Niels, my son, take me with you in thought, when the time comes for you to have a share in all the splendour that I shall never, never see !”

She wept.

Niels tried to comfort her ; he made bold plans how, in a very short time, as soon as she was quite well, they would go away together. He wanted to

go to town at once to talk to the doctor about the journey, and he was sure the doctor would agree with him that nothing could be better ; this person and that had gone abroad like this and the change alone had restored them—a change always worked wonders. He began to trace out their route at great length, talked of the care with which he would wrap her up, the short stages they would travel at first, the splendid diaries they would keep, the attention they would pay to even the most insignificant things, the amusement it would give them to dine off the strangest dishes in the loveliest places, and the shocking crimes they would commit for some time against grammar.

He went on in this way all the evening and for days after, without growing tired. She smiled at his zeal and entered readily into all his plans, for they were pleasing fancies to her ; at the same time, it was easy to see that she was convinced the journey would never come to anything.

By the doctor's advice, however, Niels went on making all the necessary preparations, and she let him do what he liked, let him fix even the day of departure, so certain was she that something would happen to upset all their plans. But when they were actually within a few days of the appointed date, and her youngest brother, who was to manage Lönborggaard during her absence, had arrived, she began to grow less certain and was now more anxious than any of them to hurry on their departure, for she still had a lurking fear that an obstacle would turn up at the very last moment.

So they set off.

The remains of her fear made her nervous and restless all the first day, and only when it was safely over was it possible for her to feel and understand that she was really on the way to all the splendour for which she had so passionately longed. An almost feverish joy took possession of her and an exaggerated expectation characterised all her words and thoughts, which now turned on nothing but what each succeeding day would bring forth.

It all came at last—everything came, but it neither impressed her as powerfully nor absorbed her as intensely as she had imagined it would. She had expected it to be quite different, but she had expected herself to be different too. In dreams and in poetry it had always lain, as it were, on the other side of the sea ; the mist of distance had prudently veiled the restless swarm of details and, with bold strokes, gathered forms together into a compact whole ; the silence of distance had diffused its solemn spirit over everything and it had been easy to see only the beautiful side. Now, however, that she was in the midst of the splendour, and every little detail stood out separately, eloquent with the many voices of reality, while beauty was dispersed like the rays from a prism—now she was unable to collect it, to bring it over from the other side of the sea, and, in deep despondency, she was obliged to confess to herself that she felt poor in the midst of all this wealth she could not make her own.

She pressed on, ever further, to see if there were

not one place she could recognise as a part of that world of which she had dreamed; but with every step she took to approach it, it seemed to lose the magic glitter with which it had hitherto been resplendent, appearing to her disappointed gaze illumined in the ordinary way by the sun and moon of the everyday world. Her search was unsuccessful, and, as the year was already far advanced, they hastened to Clarens, where the doctor had advised them to spend the winter, and whither, too, a last faint hope still beckoned the weary, dream-haunted soul; for was it not Rousseau's Clarens—Julie's paradise?

Here they remained; but in vain did winter wear its mildest aspect and hold back its cold breath, it could not shield her from the sickness in her blood; and when spring came on its triumphal procession through the valley, with its miracles of germination and its gospel of budding leaves, it had to leave her standing alone, withering in the midst of all this lavish transformation. The new force that streamed from light and air, from earth and moisture, brought no strength to her; her blood felt no healthy craving to join in the universal rejoicings over the omnipotence of spring. No, she was doomed to fade. That last dream, which in her secluded home had seemed to her like a new dawn—the dream of the splendours of a distant world—was followed by no day; the nearer she approached it the more its colours faded, but she felt that they faded only for her, because she craved for colours that life does not possess, for a beauty that earth cannot ripen. But her longing did not die out; it

burned hot and silent in her heart, and the pain grew ever fiercer and more destructive.

Meanwhile the gorgeous festival of spring was being celebrated around her ; it was rung in by the white bells of the snowdrop and joyfully greeted by the veined chalice of the crocus. Hundreds of little mountain-streams dashed headlong down into the valley to announce that spring had come, but they were all too late, for on every green bank past which they hastened stood primroses in yellow and violets in blue and nodded, " We know it, we know it, we knew it before you ! " Willows hoisted yellow streamers, and curly ferns and velvety moss hung green festoons on the naked walls of the vineyards, while hundreds of dead nettles hid the bottom of the walls with long borders of brown and green and dull purple. The grass spread its green mantle far and wide, and many fine flowers sat down upon it : hyacinths with blossoms like stars and blossoms like pearls ; myriads of daisies ; gentians, anemones, dandelions, and hundreds of other flowers. High above these flowers of earth, and borne on the trunks of hoary cherry-trees, countless flower-islands swayed in the soft breeze ; the light foamed upon their white coasts, and the butterflies spotted them with red and blue when they brought tidings from the flower-continent below.

Each succeeding day brought fresh flowers, forcing them out of the earth in gaudy patterns in the gardens by the lake and unloading them upon the branches of the trees—giant violets on the *Paullinias* and large purple-striped tulips on the magnolias.

The flowers thronged the paths in rows of blue and white, and filled the meadows with yellow flocks ; but nowhere were they as thick as in the lonely sheltered valleys among the hills, where the ruby cones of the larch shone out amid its light green foliage. Here the narcissus bloomed in dazzling myriads, filling the air with the overpowering perfume of its white orgies.

In the midst of all this beauty her heart was filled with the same unsatisfied longing, and only sometimes of an evening, when the sun sank behind the gentle slopes of the Savoy hills and the light seemed to penetrate the steep sides of the mountains on the opposite shore, giving them the appearance of opaque brown glass—only then could nature absorb her senses. When the golden mists of the evening hid the distant Jura mountains, and the lake glowed like a copper mirror, with tongues of flame rising to meet the sunset—when it appeared to melt into the splendour of the sky, forming with it one vast, glittering sea of infinity—then it sometimes seemed as if her longing were stilled, as if her soul had found the land it sought.

As the spring advanced she grew weaker, and soon she could not leave her bed. She was not afraid of death now—indeed, she longed for it, for she hoped on the other side of the grave to find herself face to face with all the splendour and one in spirit with that ideal beauty, which here on earth had filled her with vague hopes and yearnings—yearnings which through long years of life had been purified and ennobled by an ever-increasing sense of want,

and were now to reach their goal at last; and she dreamed many a melancholy dream of how in memory she would look back on what earth had given her, look back on it hereafter from the land of immortality, where all the beauty of the earth, for all time, would be on the other side of the sea.

And so she died, and Niels buried her in the pleasant cemetery at Clarens, where the brown vineyard soil covers the children of so many lands, and where the broken columns and veiled urns repeat the same words of grief in as many different tongues.

They gleam white amidst dark cypresses and winter-flowering viburnum; early roses sprinkle many of them with their petals and the earth is often blue with violets at their base; but round every mound and every stone twine the glossy leaves and tendrils of the gentle periwinkle, Rousseau's favourite flower—blue as never a heaven yet was blue.

NIELS LYHNE hastened homewards, for he could not bear his loneliness among so many strangers ; but the nearer he drew to Copenhagen, the oftener he asked himself what he really wanted there, and the more deeply he regretted that he had not stayed away. For whom had he in Copenhagen ? Not Frithiof, nor Erik either, for the latter had won a travelling-scholarship and gone to Italy ; and Fru Boye ? His position with regard to Fru Boye was such a strange one. Coming straight from his mother's grave, his intimacy with her did not strike him as exactly profane or the like, but it would not harmonise with the tone in which his present mood vibrated. It formed a discord. Had he been going to meet his promised bride, some young and blushing maiden, after the long consecration of his soul to the discharge of filial duties, it would not have been at variance with his feelings. And it was to no purpose that he endeavoured to rise superior to himself by calling this altered view of his relations with Fru Boye narrow-minded and provincial. The word Bohemian rose almost unconsciously to his lips to express the disapproval that he could not reason away, and it was in keeping with such



sentiments that the first house he visited, after having secured his old rooms on the embankment, was the Neergaard's and not Fru Boye's.

He went next day, but did not see her. The porter said that she had taken a villa near Emiliekilde, which astonished Niels, for he knew that her father's country house was in that neighbourhood.

He would have to go out there one of these days.

But the very next brought him a note from Fru Boye, appointing to meet him at her house in town. The pale niece had seen him in the street. He was to come at a quarter to one, he *must* come. She would tell him why, *if he did not know*. Did he know? He must not misjudge her or be unreasonable. For he knew her. Why should he interpret it as plebeian natures would? Would he though? They were not like other people. If he would *only* understand her! Niels! Niels!

This note threw him into a state of great excitement, and he suddenly remembered with some uneasiness the half-derisive, half-sympathetic look that Fru Neergaard had given him the other day; she had smiled, and been silent, strangely silent. What could it be, what in all the world could it be?

The feeling that had kept him away from Fru Boye had vanished. He could not even understand it now, he was so uneasy. If only they had written to each other like sensible people! Why had they not done so? He had not really been as busy as

all that. It was remarkable how he let the place he was in take entire possession of him, and forgot everything that was not there. No, he did not forget it, but he pushed it into the background, and let the present bury it—as under mountains. No one would ever think that he had imagination.

At last. Fru Boye herself opened the hall-door to him, before he had time to ring. She said nothing, but gave him a long sympathetic pressure of the hand; the papers had, of course, announced his loss. Niels likewise said nothing, and they walked in silence through the first room, between two rows of chairs in red-striped covers. The chandelier was wrapped in paper and the window-panes were whitened. In the sitting-room everything was as usual, except that the venetian-blinds were down before the open windows; they moved to and fro in the slight draught, tapping gently and monotonously against the window sashes. A subdued reflection of the sunlit canal filtered in between the yellow slats and formed on the ceiling a moving panel of undulating lines that quivered with the ripples outside. Otherwise everything was hushed and still, and seemed to be waiting with bated breath. . . .

Fru Boye could not make up her mind where to sit. At last she decided on the rocking-chair, and dusted it assiduously with her handkerchief. She did not, however, sit down, but merely stood behind the chair with her hands resting upon the back. She had not taken off her gloves and had only drawn one arm out of the black mantle that she

wore over a tartan silk dress of a very small check. She had on a large Pamela hat, trimmed with ribbons to match the dress, and the light brim half hid her face, especially as she stood at this moment looking down, while she rocked the chair energetically.

Niels sat down on the piano-stool at some distance from her, as if he were expecting to hear something unpleasant.

"Have you heard, Niels?"

"No. What is it I am to hear?"

The chair stood still. "I am engaged."

"You are engaged! But why? How?"

"Oh, leave off calling me 'you';\* don't begin by being unreasonable!" She leaned somewhat defiantly upon the rocking-chair. "You (*du*) can surely understand that it is not particularly pleasant for me to have to stand here and explain everything to you. I mean to do it, but you might help me."

"You know that's all nonsense! Are you engaged or are you not?"

"I have told you already," she said, looking up rather impatiently.

"Then I beg leave to congratulate you, Fru Boye, and to thank you sincerely for the time we have known each other." He rose and bowed sarcastically several times.

"And you can part from me as calmly as this? I am engaged, and so we are done with each other; all that has passed between us is an old and foolish story that must be forgotten. Bygones are to be

\* *De*, not the more familiar *du* (thou).

by-gones ! Without more ado ! . . . Is the remembrance of all those precious days to be blotted out, Niels ? Will you never think of me, never miss me ? Will you not sometimes, on a quiet evening, dream the dream into life again and give it the colours with which it might have glowed ? Can you desist from living through it all again in thought and forcing it to the ripeness it might have attained ? Can you ? Can you set your foot on it and crush every atom of it out of existence ? Niels ! ”

“ I hope so ; have you not shown me that it can be done ? Oh, you know it is all nonsense, utter nonsense from beginning to end ! Why have you arranged this comedy ? Of course, I have not the vestige of a right to reproach you. You have never loved me and never said that you did. You permitted me to love you, yes, you did, and now you withdraw your permission ; or am I to go on loving you, although you have given yourself to another ? I do not understand you ; did you think *that* possible ? We are not children. Or are you afraid that I shall forget you too quickly ? Set your mind at rest. You are not so easily effaced from one’s life. But take care ! A woman does not meet with a love like mine twice in her life. Beware, lest casting me off bring you misfortune ! I wish you no evil, no, indeed. May you be preserved from all want and sickness, may all the happiness that riches, admiration and position can give you, be yours in the very highest degree—that is my heartfelt wish. May the whole world stand open to you, with the exception of one small door,

one single little door, which, no matter how long you knock, how often you try it—but everything else, everything that heart can desire !”

He spoke slowly, in sorrow rather than in anger, and with a strange tremble in his voice which she had never heard before and which impressed her. She grew rather pale and leaned stiffly against the chair. “Niels,” she said, “do not predict misfortune ; remember, you were not here, Niels, and I did not know how real my love was. It seemed merely to interest me, it echoed through my life like a beautiful poem ; it never seized me with powerful arms ; it had wings—only wings. I thought so ; I knew no better until to-day or, at any rate, until I consented to be another’s wife. It was so difficult, too, so much was involved, and so many things had to be taken into consideration. . . . It began with my brother, Hardenskjold—it was he, you know, who went to the West Indies. He was inclined to be rather wild here, but over there he grew staid and sensible, went into partnership with some one, made a great deal of money and married a rich widow, a charming little creature. Then he came home, and father and he were reconciled, for Hatte was quite changed. Oh, he is so respectable, so prodigiously respectable, so sensitive about what people say ; fearfully narrow ! Ugh !—He thought of course that I should make it up with the family, and preached and implored and talked nonsense every time he came ; and father is an old man now, you know, and so I gave way—and everything is just as it used to be.”

She paused for a moment and then began to take off mantle, hat and gloves. Thus occupied, she turned slightly away from Niels and continued :

“ And Hatte had a friend, who is much respected, *very* highly respected, and they all thought I should ; they wished it so much, for then, you see, I could take up my old position in society again, indeed, if anything, a better one, for he is thought so much of in every respect—and that has been my wish for a long time now. I suppose you can't understand such a thing ? You would never have thought it of me ? Quite the contrary ? Because I always made fun of society and all its conventional stupidities, its patent morality, its thermometer of virtue and compass of womanliness—you remember how witty we were ? It is enough to make one weep, for it was not true, not in the least. Let me tell you something, Niels : we women can wrench ourselves free for a time, when something comes into our life which opens our eyes and awakens the thirst for freedom inherent in us, but we cannot hold out long, for we are mastered by a passion in our blood, a passion for the *ne plus ultra* of correctness, for the most prudish extremes of propriety. We cannot sustain a war against what has been once for all accepted by the world at large ; in our heart of hearts we believe that the world is right, because it passes judgment, and we submit inwardly to its sentence and suffer beneath it, no matter what bold faces we wear. It is not for us women to be exceptions, Niels ; it makes us too conspicuous—

more interesting, perhaps, but otherwise. . . . Do you see ? It is pitiable, isn't it ? But you will, at least, understand that it made a strange impression on me to return to the old surroundings ; so many things came back to me—the memory of my mother and what *she* used to think. Everything was so quiet and orderly that it seemed as if I had come into port again, and as if I only needed to bind myself to it, to be perfectly happy all the days of my life. And so I let myself be bound, Niels."

Niels could not help smiling ; he felt so much her superior, and he was sorry for her, as she stood before him, looking childishly unhappy over her confession. His heart melted and he could not think of a single harsh word.

He went over to her.

Meanwhile she had turned the chair round and sunk languidly into it. She lay back in a forlorn attitude of dejection, with her arms hanging listlessly by her sides, gazing with upturned face and half-closed eyes through the twilight of the next room with its two rows of chairs, into the dark passage.

Niels leaned over the back of her chair, and, with one hand resting on the arm, he bent down and whispered to her, "And you had quite forgotten me ?"

It seemed as if she had not heard him, for she did not even raise her eyes ; at length she shook her head almost imperceptibly and, some time afterwards, repeated the movement.

For a while there was perfect silence. Then they heard a servant polishing the door-handles on the common stair, singing as she did so ; the rattling broke in upon them in a brutal manner, and, when it suddenly ceased, left the silence deeper than before. Soon all was still again, and only the soft rhythmical tapping of the venetians was audible.

This silence robbed them of speech and almost of thought. She was sitting as before, with her eyes fixed on the dark passage, and he still bent over her, staring at the check of her silk dress. Presently, tempted by the stillness, he began almost unconsciously to rock the chair, ve-ry gently—ve-ry gently. . . .

She slowly raised her eyes and glanced at his shaded profile, then dropped them again in silent enjoyment. It was like a long embrace—as if she were sinking into his arms—when the chair went back ; and when it went forward, so that her feet touched the ground, it seemed to her that there was something of him in the soft pressure of the floor against her foot. He felt it too ; the rocking began to interest him, and he gradually rocked harder. It seemed as if the further he pulled the chair back, the nearer he was to possessing her, and there was a second of something like suspense before he let it swing again. When it went forward, the gentle tap with which her unresisting feet struck the floor afforded him a peculiar satisfaction, and he felt as if she were altogether his when he forced the chair so far forward that her soles were pressed against the floor and her knees rose a little.



"We must not dream," Niels sighed, letting the chair go with an air of resignation.

"Why not?" she almost implored, looking innocently up at him with large melancholy eyes.

She slowly rose from the chair.

"No, no dreaming!" said Niels nervously, as he put his arm round her waist. "There have been dreams enough between us; have you not felt it? Have they never touched your cheek or passed through your hair like fleeting breaths? Is it possible that you have never felt the quivering sighs of the night sink down and die upon your lips?"

He kissed her, and it seemed to him that she grew less young beneath his kiss, less young but lovelier, more radiantly beautiful and bewitching.

"I must tell you," he said; "you do not know how I love you, how I have longed for you and what I have suffered. If those rooms of mine on the embankment could speak, Tema!"

He kissed her again and again, and she threw her arms passionately round his neck. The loose sleeves of her dress fell back, exposing not only her soft, white under-sleeves, but also the bands of grey elastic that held the latter above her elbows.

"What would the rooms say, Niels?"

"They would say, 'Tema, Tema,' ten thousand times and more; they would pray in this name, rave in this name, sigh and sob in it. They could threaten, too, Tema."

"Could they?"

An entire conversation floated up to them through the open windows from the street below—

the indifferent wisdom of the world in threadbare common-places, ground out unfeelingly by two gossiping voices. All this prose found its way in to them, making it only the more glorious to stand there, breast to breast, screened by the soft, dim light.

"How I love you, my sweet, my sweet—it is so good to have you in my arms, isn't it? Are you not happy?—and your hair . . . I can scarcely speak, and all the thoughts . . . so good . . . memories of tears and wretchedness and unutterable longings—they overwhelm me, pressing forward as if they wished now to share my happiness with me—do you understand? . . . Tema, do you remember those moonlight nights last year? Were they not glorious? . . . Ah, you do not know how cruel the moon can be. On a clear moonlight night, when the air has frozen in the chilly light and the clouds are motionless—flowers and leaves keep their fragrance as close to them as if it were a hoar-frost lying upon them, and all sounds grow distant and cease suddenly and abruptly. A night like this has no mercy; its silence makes our longing burn fierce and intense, drawing it forth from every corner of our soul, sucking it out with cruel lips, and not a hope or promise shines in all the still, cold splendour. Oh, I have wept, Tema! Have you never wept through a moonlight night? No, my darling, it were a sin for you to weep; you must not weep; there should always be sunshine about you, and nights of roses—a night of roses . . ."

She had sunk right into his arms; her glance

was lost in his, and her lips murmured, as in a dream, wondrous sweet words of love, which her breath half stifled—words of his, which she repeated over and over again, as if she were whispering them to her heart.

Outside, the voices in the street grew fainter and she became restless. Soon they returned, accompanied by the short rhythmical taps of a stick on the pavement, then, crossing to the other side, they lingered for some time, muffled by distance, and, growing fainter, died away.

And the silence rose up again, or, rather, it blazed up around them, making their hearts beat and their breath come hard. Words gave out between them, and kisses came as reluctantly from their lips as questions we hesitate to ask, but they brought no relief, not an instant of enjoyment. They dared not evade each other's eyes, but as little did they dare to give words to their glance; they veiled it, as it were, and hid from each other behind it, brooding in silence over mysterious dreams.

Suddenly a trembling came over his embrace and awakened her; she pressed her hands against his breast and wrenched herself free.

"Go, Niels, go, you ought not to be here. Do you hear what I say? Go away at once!"

He tried to draw her to him, but she drew back, pale and bewildered. She was trembling from head to foot, and held her arms out from her sides as if she dared not touch herself.

Niels wanted to kneel down and take her hand.

"You must not touch me!" There was des-

peration in her eyes. "Why do you not go when I ask you? Oh, will you never go? No, no, not a word, go away! Do you not see how I am trembling? Look—look! It is shameful of you to treat me like this! If I implore you to go?"

It was impossible to get in a word; she would not listen. She was beside herself, tears streamed from her eyes, her face was almost distorted and seemed literally to shine with paleness. What could he do?

"Will you never go? Do you not see how your presence humiliates me? You are ill-treating me—yes, you are! What have I done to you that you should be so cruel? Oh, go! Have you no pity?"

Pity? He was cold with rage. What folly was this? There was nothing for it but to go. He went. He did not go out of his way to avoid the two rows of chairs, but walked slowly between them, with his eyes defiantly fixed upon them.

"Exit Niels Lyhne," he said to himself, as he heard the latch of the hall-door fall behind him.

He went thoughtfully down the stairs with his hat in his hand. On the landing he paused and gesticulated to himself. If he could only understand what had happened! Why *this*, and again, why that? He went on. There were the open windows. He was seized with a desire to rend the silence up there with a shrill cry, or to have some one to talk to, to talk without mercy for hours together, to talk nonsense into that silence, to

bathe it cold in nonsense. He could not get it out of his blood ; he could see it and taste it, and it surrounded him on all sides. Suddenly he paused and grew scarlet with an indignant sense of shame. Had she deliberately put herself in the way of temptation ?

Upstairs, Fru Boye still stood and wept ; she was standing before the mirror with both hands resting upon the console, and weeping so bitterly that the tears dripped off her cheeks into the rose-pink interior of a large shell. She looked at her troubled face as it appeared above the film that her breath formed on the glass, and watched the tears as they welled forth from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. How could they still flow ? She had never cried like this before—yes, once in Frascati, when the horses bolted with her.

In the course of time the tears came less plentifully, but nervous fits of trembling still shook her at intervals from head to foot.

The sun was more on the windows now ; on the ceiling the quivering reflection of the ripples fell aslant, and, at the sides of the venetians, whole rows of parallel rays, shelves of yellow light, made their way in. The heat increased, and other odours mingled with the strong smell of warm dust and heated wood that pervaded the room ; from gaudy flowers on the sofa cushions, from silken chair-backs, from books and folded carpets, the heat set free a hundred forgotten perfumes that swept ghostlike through the air.

Her trembling gradually abated and left in its

place a curious dizziness, in which fantastic feelings that were half perceptions whirled away on the tracks of her bewildered thoughts. She closed her eyes, but remained standing with her face towards the glass.

Strange how it had come over her! Such a piercing fear! Had she screamed? A scream seemed still to linger in her ear, and her throat felt tired as if from a long and fearful cry. If he had seized her! She imagined it to herself and pressed her hands against his breast to free herself. She struggled, but in vain—and then—she seemed to be sinking naked through the air, burning with shame and impudently caressed by all the winds. He would not go, and soon it would be too late; her strength forsook her like bursting bubbles: one after another the bubbles rose and burst—incessantly. A moment more and it would be too late! Had she implored him on her knees? Too late! An irresistible impulse drew her to his arms: as a bubble quivers upwards through the water, so her soul rose naked to him; every wish lay bare before him, each secret dream of self-surrender was unveiled to his covetous glance. Again she lingered in the sweet tremor of his embrace. An alabaster statue in the midst of flames, a statue which becomes transparent in the fierce heat of the fire, losing more and more of its dark centre, until at length the whole is luminously bright.

She slowly opened her eyes and looked at her reflection in the glass with a discreet smile, as if it were a confederate before whom she did not wish

to commit herself too deeply. Then, going round the room, she gathered together gloves, hat and mantle.

The dizziness seemed to have been blown away.

She rather enjoyed the sensation of weakness in her knees, and continued moving about the room in order to feel it. As if by accident, she gave the rocking-chair a confidential little push with her elbow.

To tell the truth, she rather enjoyed scenes.

With a last glance, she took leave of an invisible something, then drew up the blinds and it was quite a different room.

Three weeks later Fru Boye was married, and Niels Lyhne was left entirely to himself.

He could not get rid of a feeling of indignation, when he thought of the contemptible way in which she had cast herself into the arms of the society she had so often ridiculed. Of course, it had only needed to open the door and beckon to her, and she had gone at once. But was it worth his while to cast a stone? Had not he himself felt the magnetic attraction of honest Philistinism? He only blamed her for that last meeting, if it was what it had seemed to be—a wanton farewell to her old life, the last foolish prank before she retired behind the barriers of the most rigid propriety. Was it possible? Such infinite self-contempt, such cynical self-derision, that he, too, was drawn beneath its shadow, he and all the memories, hopes, enthusiasms and holy thoughts they had had in common. It

made him redden with anger. But was he just? For, after all, what had she done but say to him openly and honestly: this and that attracts me to the other side, attracts me powerfully, but I acknowledge your right even more fully than you yourself demand, and here I am. If you can take me, then take me; if not, I must follow the stronger force. And if this were so, was she not justified in what she had done? He had not been able to take her . . . and yet, so little might have turned the scale at the final decision—the key of a mood, the mere shadow of a thought.

If he only knew what she, for at least one moment, *must* have known, even although she were conscious of it no longer. He was so unwilling to believe the one thing for which he could not help blaming her. Not only for her own sake, that perhaps, least of all, but it seemed to have left a stain upon his colours. From a logical point of view, of course not, but nevertheless. . . .

In whatever way she had chosen to desert him, one thing was certain, he was now alone, and at first he felt his loss deeply. Later on, however, it was a relief to him. So much was waiting for him; however deeply it had engrossed him at the time, the year spent between Lönborggaard and foreign lands had been an involuntary pause, and the clearer insight into his merits and deficiencies that he had gained during this year had only increased his desire to make use of his talents in the undisturbed seclusion of work. Not for purposes of active production—there was no hurry for that—



but to collect material. There was so much to be acquired, so incalculably much, that he began to survey life's brevity with distrustful glances. He had not exactly wasted his time, hitherto, but it is not so easy to be independent of the paternal library, and it is very convenient to follow the same roads that have led others to the goal ; therefore he had never sought out for himself a Wine-land in the wide world of books, but had gone on as his fathers before him. With unquestioning faith he had shut his eyes to much that attracted him, in order to see more plainly in the great night of the Eddas and Sagas ; he had been deaf to many things that called him, in order to listen to the mystic, natural sounds of the songs of the people. Now he had at length perceived that he was under no physical necessity to be either Old-Norse or Romantic ; that it was simpler to proclaim his doubts himself than to put them in the mouth of Gorm Lokedyrker, and more rational to find expression for the mystery of his own being than to call to the cloister walls of the Middle Ages and hear his words returned to him with the faintness of an echo.

He had, indeed, always been alive to the new ideas of the time, but he had been too busy listening to the manner in which these ideas were dimly foreshadowed in the past, to hear the clear and distinct message that the present had to give ; and there was nothing remarkable in this, for never yet has a new gospel been preached on earth but what the whole world was immediately busy with the old prophecies.

But something else was necessary, and Niels threw himself with enthusiasm into his new work. He was seized by that desire for conquest, that thirst for the power of knowledge, which every servant of the mind—however humble his subsequent work—has felt at least once, and were it only for a single, short-lived hour. Which of us, so placed by a kindly fate that he can take thought for the development of his mind—which of us has not looked out over the mighty sea of knowledge with the eyes of enthusiasm, and who, attracted to its clear, cool water, has not begun with the credulous arrogance of youth, to bale it out in the hollow of his hand, like the child in the story? If you remember, the sun might smile upon the fair summer land, you saw neither flower, nor cloud, nor stream; life's festivals might all sweep past, they awakened no dreams in your young blood; even your home was strange to you—do you remember? And then, do you remember how the idea assumed definite form and rose before your mind from the yellow pages of the books, self-contained as a work of art—it was yours in every detail and your spirit leavened the whole. When the slender columns rose into the air, displaying their conscious strength in powerful curves, this proud strength was yours, yours, too, this bold upward sweep of form. And when the vault appeared to float—its whole burden amassed, drawn from each separate stone, and confidently let down in mighty drops of weight upon the necks of the columns—this dream of weightless suspension was

your own, for the confidence with which the vault sank—was it not you, you who set foot upon your own possession ?

Yes, thus it is, thus our nature grows with our knowledge and is moulded and purified by it. It is as beautiful to learn as to live. Do not be afraid of losing yourself in minds greater than your own ! Do not sit and brood uneasily over the peculiarities of your soul, or shut yourself off from powerful influences for fear they may carry you away and drown your treasured individuality in their mighty flood ! Be assured, the characteristic that is lost in the arrangement and re-modelling of a vigorous development is only a blemish, a shoot that has sprung up in the dark and is original only as long as it is sick and pale from want of light. And you must live by what is sound and healthy within you, for only what is healthy becomes great.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christmas Eve came unexpectedly for Niels Lyhne.

For the past six months he had been nowhere, except once or twice to the Neergaards', and he had an invitation to spend this evening there ; but the preceding Christmas had been the Christmas at Clarens and, for this reason, he wished to be alone. A few hours after dark he went out.

The wind was high. A light coating of snow, as yet almost untrodden, lay upon the streets, making them seem broader, and the white snow on the roofs and along the window-sills gave the houses a festive but, at the same time, more desolate

appearance. The street lamps, flickering in the wind, cast their light, as if absent-mindedly, along the walls, rousing here and there from its dreams a signboard, which stared before it in large-lettered vacancy of mind. The shop windows, too, only half lit-up and in disorder from the business of the day, looked different from what they usually did ; a strange air of contemplation had come over them.

He turned into the narrow streets, and here Christmas rejoicings seemed already in full swing, for he was greeted by the sound of music from basements and ground floors wherever he went. Sometimes he heard a violin, but it was more frequently an accordion which snuffled assiduously through popular dance-music, suggesting by the hearty manner of performance the pleasant exertion of the dance rather than the festivities peculiar to the season. But it called up a certain illusion of a steaming atmosphere and shuffling feet—so it seemed to the outsider who, in his solitude, felt polemically disposed towards this sociability. He had much more sympathy with a workman who stood outside the dimly lighted windows of a little shop, discussing with his children one of the cheap wonders inside, evidently anxious that their choice should be irrevocably made before they ventured into the cave of temptation. And then these demure old ladies, one of whom he met almost every hundred yards ! All of them wore the quaint cloaks and capes of a day long past, and they all had a shy, gentle way of moving their old necks, like distrustful birds. There was a slight hesitation in

their gait, as if they were unfamiliar with the world, as if they had sat, one day after another, forgotten in the by-world of a back top-storey, and were only remembered and carried forward on this single evening in the whole year. It made him sad to think of it, and there was a sick sensation at his heart as, in imagination, he lived into the dreary existence of one of these solitary old maids ; he seemed to hear the slow, monotonous tick-tick, tick-tick of a clock, dripping into the goblet of the day and filling it with empty seconds.

He had to see about getting supper somewhere, and returned the same way he had come, with a half-conscious dread lest in other streets he should feel his solitude more intensely, or be overcome by a keener sense of desolation than that which had awaited him here and left such a bitter taste upon his lips.

Out in the broader streets he breathed more freely ; he stepped out briskly with a certain defiance in his gait, severing every connection between himself and what he had left behind him by the thought that *his* solitude was of his own choosing.

He went into a large restaurant.

While he sat waiting for his supper, he watched the people coming in, from behind the supplement of an old newspaper. They were almost exclusively young people. Some of them came alone, several with a slightly defiant bearing, as if to forbid those present to consider them as fellow-sufferers. Others could ill conceal their embarrassment at not being invited out on such an evening as this ; but they

all showed a marked preference for lonely corners and out-of-the-way tables. Some came in couples, and it was evident that most of these couples were brothers; Niels had never seen so many brothers together before. They were often extremely unlike each other both in dress and appearance, and their hands bore still clearer witness to the difference in their position in life. It was rare to perceive any real intimacy between them, either when they entered or even after they had sat talking to each other for some time. Here, one was the superior, the other the admirer; there, one was friendly, the other reserved, and here again was a formal attentiveness on both sides, or, worse still, unspoken condemnation of their respective work, hopes and aims. For most of them, an evening like the present, with its accompanying sense of desolation, was evidently necessary to remind them of their common origin and draw them together.

While Niels sat thinking of all this, and marveling at the patience with which all these people waited, as if they had tacitly agreed to keep the place as free as possible from the character of a restaurant, for they neither rang nor called loudly for the waiters—while he was thinking of all this, he saw an acquaintance enter, and the sudden sight of a familiar face after so many strange ones took him so much by surprise that he impulsively rose and greeted the new-comer with a glad and astonished "Good evening!"

"Are you expecting any one?" asked the latter, looking for a peg for his overcoat.

"No, solo."

"Why, that's first-rate!"

The new-comer was a Dr. Hjerrild, a young man Niels had met once or twice at the Neergaards', and whom he knew—not from his own words, but from several sarcastic allusions of Fru Neergaard's—to be an extreme free-thinker in religious matters; from his conversation, on the other hand, he knew that in politics Hjerrild was just the reverse. People of this sort were not generally to be met at the Councillor's house, for the latter was orthodox and liberal. By reason both of the views he held and the influence of his mother, the doctor really belonged to one of the circles, so numerous at that time, in which the new freedom was regarded with partly sceptical, partly hostile eyes, and the members of which in religious matters were more than rationalists and less than atheists, if they were not either indifferent or inclined to mysticism, as was sometimes the case. In these circles, which in other respects were remarkable for fine shades of difference, it was thought that Holstein was as dear to the heart as Jutland, absolutely no kinship was felt with Sweden, and the New-Danish form of Danism did not meet with unconditional approval. Finally, they knew their Molière better than their Holberg, Baggesen better than Oehlenschläger, and their taste in matters artistic inclined to the sentimental.

It was under the influence of these or, at any rate, similar views and sympathies that Hjerrild had developed.

He sat looking doubtfully at Niels, while the latter

imparted to him his observations on the other customers, dwelling especially on the evident embarrassment they betrayed at not having a home, or even a homely spot, to attract them this evening.

"Yes, I quite understand that," he replied coldly and almost repellantly. "No one comes here with a very good grace on Christmas Eve. We cannot escape a humiliating consciousness of being shut out, no matter whether we ourselves or other people are to blame for it. Will you tell me why you are here? If you would rather not, just say so."

Niels answered simply that he had spent the previous Christmas Eve with his mother.

"I beg your pardon," said Hjerrild; "it was very good of you to answer me, but you must excuse me, I am so distrustful. Let me explain. You can imagine certain people coming here to have a youthful kick at Christmas, and I, you see, am here out of respect for other people's Christmas. This is the first Christmas Eve I have not spent with a family that I knew in my native town, but I have got the idea that I am in the way when they are singing their Christmas hymns. Not that they show embarrassment—they are too much in earnest for that—but I think it makes them feel uncomfortable to have some one sitting there for whom all their songs are sung only to the winds."

They took their meal almost in silence, then lighted their cigars and agreed to drink their toddy elsewhere. Neither of them had a mind on the present evening to see the gilded mirror-frames and red sofas that met their eyes almost every other even-



ing in the year, and therefore they turned into a little café, which at other times they never frequented.

They saw at once that they would not remain here long.

The landlord, the waiters and a few friends were playing loo with two trumps. The landlord's wife and daughters looked on and acted as waitresses. They did not, however, attend to the two newcomers ; one of the waiters brought them what they ordered. They hastened to empty their glasses, for they soon noticed that they were in the way ; voices were lowered immediately, and the landlord, who had been sitting in his shirt-sleeves, could not prevail on himself to remain as he was, but slipped into his coat.

"We are pretty well houseless to-night," said Niels as they went down the street.

"Yes, that is just as it should be," was Hjerrild's rather pathetic answer.

They got to talking about Christianity. The subject may be said to have been in the air.

Niels talked vehemently, but in rather a general way, against Christianity.

Hjerrild was weary of following the tracks of discussions that were old to him, and said suddenly, without any very close connection with what had gone before : "Take care, Herr Lyhne ; Christianity is powerful. It is foolish to fall out with the reigning truth by agitating for the Heir-apparent truth."

"Foolish, or not foolish, such a consideration is not to the point."

"Do not say that so lightly ; it was not my intention to tell you the truism that it is foolish from a material point of view ; the idea itself is foolish and worse than foolish. Take care ! Unless it is absolutely necessary to your nature, do not bind yourself too firmly just now to such ideas. As a poet, you know, you have so many other interests."

"I really do not understand you ; I can't be expected to treat myself like a barrel-organ, to take out an unpopular piece and put in another that every one is whistling."

"Can you not ? There are people who do. But, you know, you might say, don't let us play this piece. As a rule, we can do more in this line than we ourselves believe. A man is not as strictly consistent as all that. If you constantly use your right arm with force, an excess of blood rushes to it and it increases in growth at the cost of the rest of your body, while your legs, which you only use when it is absolutely necessary, become a little thinner of themselves. You know how to apply my illustration ? Look how nearly all the best intellectual energy in the land has been devoted exclusively to political freedom. Mark that, and let it be a lesson to you. Believe me, the happiness a man feels in fighting for an idea that is successful has an ennobling effect, while it is demoralising to belong to the losing minority, which life makes out to be in the wrong at every point and every step of its course. It cannot be otherwise, for it is bitterly disheartening to see what, in the silence of our soul,

we are convinced is truth and justice, to see this truth insulted and struck in the face by every wretched camp-follower in the conquering army; to hear it heaped with abusive epithets, and to be able to do nothing, nothing but love it still more fervently, and kneel before it in spirit with still greater reverence; for its beautiful countenance remains as radiantly beautiful as ever, as full of majesty and undying light, no matter how much dust is whirled against its white forehead, or how thick the poisonous vapours gather round its head. It is bitterly disheartening to think that our souls are injured by this devotion, but the injury is inevitable; for it is so easy to hate until our hearts are weary, to summon the cold shades of disdain about us, and, blunted with our grief, let the world go its own way. If, of course, instead of choosing the easier way and withdrawing from all connection with this, a man is capable of standing erect and, with every faculty at a stretch, every sympathy alive, has strength to bear cut after cut from the many-bladed sword of defeat, and, at the same time, to keep his bleeding hope from sinking, while he listens for the hollow sounds that announce the beginning of a new epoch, and watches for the faint, distant gleam, that will some day—perchance—be a day. . . . Yes, if one has strength for *this*! But do not try it, Lyhne. Think what the life of such a man must be, if he is to be true to himself. To be unable to open his lips without jeers and scorn foaming up in the track of his speech; to have all his words perverted, defiled, and distorted, to have them twisted into

cunning snares and cast down at his feet, and then, when he has gathered them up from the dirt and unravelled them, to find that the whole world has suddenly grown deaf! And to begin afresh at another place—again and again—with the same result! And, what is perhaps most painful of all, to know that he is misjudged and despised by noble men and women to whom, in spite of difference of conviction, he looks up with admiration and respect. And it *must* be so; it cannot possibly be otherwise. An opposition must expect to be attacked, not for what it really is and aims at, but for what the party in power is pleased to believe it is, and means. And, moreover, how can the power that is employed against what is weaker than itself, and the misuse of this power, be two different things? No one, surely, demands that the superior power should weaken itself, in order to be able to fight the opposition on its own ground. But, for this reason, the struggle of the opposition is both painful and destructive. And do you really think now, Lyhne, that a man with all these vulture-claws buried in his flesh can fight this fight without the blind and stubborn enthusiasm that is fanaticism? And how in all the world is one to become fanatic about something negative? A fanatic for the idea that there is no God! And no victory without fanaticism! Hush! Listen!”

They paused before a house where one of the blinds on the ground-floor had not been let down, and through the open ventilator rang out, borne on the clear voices of women and children :

A child is born in Bethlehem,  
Bethlehem !  
Therefore rejoice, Jerusalem.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah !

They went on in silence. The melody, and particularly the sound of the piano, followed them down the quiet street.

"Did you hear," said Hjerrild, "did you hear the enthusiasm in this old Hebraic cry of victory ? And the names of those two Jewish towns ! Jerusalem was not only symbolic of the whole city—Copenhagen—Denmark ; it meant us, the Christian people of the nation."

"There is no God, and man is His prophet," said Niels bitterly, but with a touch of sadness.

"Yes, exactly !" jeered Hjerrild ; a moment afterwards he said, "Yet atheism is exceedingly modest in its claims, for its object is really nothing more or less than to disillusion mankind. The belief in a God who guides and judges is man's last great illusion, and when this is gone—what then ? He will be wiser ; but richer, happier ? I do not see it."

"Yes," exclaimed Niels Lyhne, "but do you not realise that on the day when mankind can openly exult 'There is no God'—on that day will be created, as if by magic, a new heaven and a new earth ? Not until then will the heavens be a free and boundless space instead of a threatening and searching eye. The earth will not be ours, nor shall we be the earth's, until the belief in that shadowy world of eternal bliss and eternal doom

has burst like a bubble. The earth will become our real fatherland, our heart's true home, where we abide, not as passing guests for a brief space, but for all time. And how intense life will become, when everything has to find place in it, and nothing is stored up elsewhere! The mighty stream of love that now ascends to the God of man's faith—when heaven is empty, it will turn its course to earth, and gently make its way among all the noble human qualities and powers with which, in an intensified form, we have adorned our deity to make him worthy of our love. Goodness, justice, wisdom—who can name them all? Do you not realise the ennobling influence it will have on man, when he is free to live his life and die his death, without hope of heaven or fear of hell, when all his hopes and fears are centred in himself alone? Think how rapidly his conscience will develop and his strength of character increase, when inactive repentance and humility are no longer sufficient atonement, and when the only expiation possible is to make amends by doing good, for the evil wrought by his evil deeds."

"You must have a wonderful faith in humanity. Why, atheism will end by making greater demands on it than Christianity does."

"Naturally."

"Naturally! But where are you to get all the strong natures that you will need to make up your race of atheists?"

"In the course of time atheism itself will rear them. Neither this generation nor the next, nor

the next again will be strong enough to support such convictions—I am quite aware of that—but in every generation there will always be a few individuals who will manfully fight out for themselves a life and a death in atheism, and, as time goes on, they will form a line of spiritual ancestors, on whom their descendants will look back with pride, taking courage by their example. It is at first that the conditions will be so severe ; most of our fighters will be worsted in the struggle, and those who are victorious will come forth from the fray with tattered colours. And why ? Because they are still saturated with tradition to the very marrow of their bones, and because there is so much else in a man to be convinced besides his brain—blood and nerves, hopes and longings, aye, and sometimes dreams, too. But it matters little ; the day will come when the few will be the many.”

“Do you think so ? I am trying to find a name for your belief ; might it not be called pietistic atheism ?”

“All true atheism . . . .” began Niels—but Hjerrild interrupted him at once.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “of course ! Let us, after all, have but one door, the eye of a single needle for all the camels of the earth !”

## X

ERIK REFSTRUP returned home at the beginning of summer after a residence of two years in Italy. He had gone away a sculptor, but he returned a painter, and in this capacity had already been successful, for he had sold several pictures and received orders for others.

The readiness with which success came to him at first call, as it were, was due to the confident self-limitation with which he gathered his talent about him. He was not one of those imposing and gifted natures within whose reach every laurel lies, whose career on earth is like a bacchanalian procession sweeping triumphantly through all lands and scattering golden seed on every side—a genius on every panther. He was one of those in whom a dream lies buried, a dream that sheds sanctity and peace upon a little corner of their souls where they are most, and, at the same time, least themselves. And through all that they produce in the art they have made their own, runs the same longing refrain, and the stamp of relationship that their works always bear, is as scrupulously exact as if they were pictures from the same little home, the same little nook among the mountains. It was thus with Erik ; no matter



where he dived into the ocean of beauty he always brought the same pearl to light.

His pictures were small: in the foreground, a single figure bluish in its own shadow; behind it, a heath-clad moor or plain; on the horizon, the red-gold glow of the sunset. One of them was a young girl telling her fortune in the Italian fashion. She is on her knees at a spot where the brown soil is visible beneath the short grass, and a heart, cross and anchor of wrought silver, which she has taken from her necklace, are strewn before her on the ground. One hand covers her eyes, which are fast closed, the other is stretched out in quest of the inexpressible happiness of love, or bitter grief for which the cross alone brings solace, or the unwearying hope of everyday life. She has not yet ventured to touch the ground; her hand seems afraid to move in the cold, mysterious shadow, her cheeks are flushed, and her mouth is midway between a prayer and a sob. There is a certain solemnity in the air, the red sky behind glares hot and fierce, and casts a faint, melancholy glow across the heather. "If I only knew! Love, inexpressible happiness; bitter grief and the solace of the cross; hope ever renewed, the lot of common life."

There was another, where she stands gazing longingly over the brown heath, with her cheek resting upon her clasped hands, looking very sweet in her naïve longing, and the least little bit unhappy about this perverse life that passes her by unnoticed. Why does not Eros come with his love-breathing roses? Does he think her too young? He should

only feel how her heart beats, just touch it with his hand—oh, there is a world in it, a world of worlds, if it would only waken! Why, then, does it give no sign? It lies within her breast like a bud, enclosing all its sweetness and beauty, existing only for itself and oppressed by itself. For it knows very well that there is something, although ignorant as yet as to what this something is. Has it not lain warm round the protecting leaves? Has it not descended on the bud and shed light into the inmost, reddest darkness, where the perfume, half conscious of its power, but as yet without fragrance, lies condensed in a quivering tear? Will all this never come? Is it never to breathe forth what it is dimly conscious of possessing, never to be rich with all its wealth? Will it never, never unfold and blush itself awake, while glittering sunbeams find their way under all its petals? She has really lost all patience with Eros; her lips are quivering with approaching tears, her hopeless but defiant eyes gaze into space, and the small head sinks more and more despondently, slowly turning the delicate profile towards the interior of the picture, where a gentle breeze raises a reddish dust over the dark-green of the broom against a sky of yellow gold.

This was how Erik painted, and, whatever the ideas he tried to convey, they always found expression in pictures like these. It was easy enough to conceive others, and the intensity of his longing could free him from the narrow circle within which he called them up, but, once outside, trying his hand in fresh fields, he soon became aware, with a chill

sense of discouragement, that he was borrowing from others, and that what he was producing was not his own. And on returning from one of these unsuccessful expeditions—from which, however, he learnt more each time than he himself suspected—he was more Erik Refstrup than ever; he gave himself up still more boldly, indeed, with an almost painful intensity, to his characteristic peculiarities, and continued for some time in an exalted frame of mind which left its traces on his smallest actions and was apparent from his whole bearing and behaviour. It was as if the lovely forms that dawned before his vision—younger sisters of Parmegianino's, slender women with their swan-like necks and long narrow princess-hands—as if they sat at table with him and sipped his cup with movements full of grace and dignity, holding him fast in the power of their pure dreams, with that mystical, contemplative smile of Luini's, with its mysterious sweetness and wondrous delicacy.

But, after having faithfully served his god for eleven days, it would often happen that other powers within him gained the upper hand, and he would be seized with a desperate craving for the coarse pleasure of coarse enjoyments. He would give way to this, stricken by the purely human desire for self-destruction, which, when the blood burns, as only blood can, craves for degradation, dirt and mire with the same degree of intensity that is peculiar to another equally human desire—that of keeping oneself greater and purer than one actually is.

At such times few things were coarse and violent enough for him, and, when the fit was over, it took him a long time to recover his balance, for he was so healthy and so little tainted with dreams that, to a certain extent, it was not natural to him. It was almost like a revolt against this devotion to the higher powers of art; it seemed the revenge that his aggrieved nature demanded for his choice of that more ideal life-work that circumstances had impelled him to follow.

In the meantime, however, this two-sided struggle in Erik Refstrup was not sufficiently active to be outwardly visible, or to make him feel the need of coming to an understanding with his surroundings by its means. No, he was the same light-hearted simple fellow as of old, somewhat brusque from his dread of emotion, and a little inclined to piracy in his conversation, owing to a faculty for taking up and appropriating ideas. But it was going on within him all the same, and might be heard at quiet moments, like the bells that ring in the sunken town at the bottom of the sea. Niels and he had never understood each other so well as they did now, and, realising this, each of them tacitly formed a new covenant of friendship with the other. When, therefore, the holidays came, and Niels at length made up his mind to visit his Aunt Rosalie, the wife of Consul Claudi at Fjordby, Erik accompanied him.

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The high-road that emerges from the fertile country surrounding Fjordby, approaches the town

between two huge thorn-hedges that bound the kitchen-garden and the large garden on the shore belonging to Consul Claudi. What then becomes of the road—whether it ends at the Consul's courtyard, which is as large as a market-place, or whether it is the same one which makes a bend and, passing between his barns and timber-yard, runs through the town as a street—is a matter of opinion. Many travellers follow the bend and continue their journey, but there are many, too, who pull up and consider their goal attained when they have reached the Consul's tarred gateway. This gate always stands wide open, both halves thrown back and covered with skins hung out to dry.

All the buildings on the premises were old, with the exception of the lofty granary, the dull, monotonous slate-roof of which was the latest addition to the domain of architecture in Fjordby. The long, low front building, which looked as though it were being forced to its knees by three large attics, adjoined, in a dark corner, the brewery and the stables; in a lighter one, the granary. In the darker corner was the back door of the shop, which, together with the labourers' room, the office and the servants' rooms, formed a gloomy little world apart, where a mingled odour of cheap tobacco and mouldy flooring, of spices, rank salt-fish and damp frieze made the air so thick that you could almost taste it. But, on passing through the office, with its penetrating smell of sealing-wax, into the passage that formed the barrier between business and family,

you were gradually prepared by the predominating perfume of new millinery for the flower-scented atmosphere of the dwelling-rooms. It was not the scent of a bouquet or of a real flower ; it was that mystic, memory-laden atmosphere that lingers about every home, and of which no one can say for certain whence it comes. It reminds us of a thousand things—of the smell of old gloves, of new packs of cards, or open pianos ; every home has its own, and it is always different. It may be stifled with incense, perfumes, or cigar-smoke, but it is impossible to destroy it ; it always returns, and is there again unchanged, just as before. Here it was like flowers—not stocks or roses, or any flower that blows, but just what you would imagine to be the perfume of those fantastic sapphire-blue lilies that twine in full blossom round vases of old porcelain. And how well it suited these large low rooms, with their antiquated furniture and old-fashioned elegance ! The floors were as white as only a grandmother's floors can be ; the walls were of one colour, with a delicate flowering design beneath the cornice ; in the middle of the ceiling was a stucco-rose, and the doors were fluted and had bright brass handles in the form of dolphins. At the small-paned windows hung airy net curtains, white as snow, which were caught up in coquettish folds with bows of coloured ribbon, like the hangings of a bridal bed for Corydon and Phyllis ; old-world flowers bloomed in mottled green pots on the sills—blue African lilies, blue Canterbury-bells, small-leaved myrtles, fiery-red verbenas and geraniums,

gaudy as butterflies. But it was chiefly the furniture that gave the whole its stamp. Immovable tables with extensive surfaces of stained mahogany; chairs with backs that curled round you like a shaving; cabinets of all possible shapes, gigantic bureaus with mythological scenes—Daphne, Arachne and Narcissus—inlaid in light-yellow wood, and small secretaires on thin twisted legs, the front of every little drawer bearing a mosaic of dendritic marble depicting a simple four-cornered house with a tree beside it—all this dates from long before Napoleon. Mirrors, too, with flowers painted in white and bronze upon the glass—rushes and lotuses floating on the shining sea. And then the sofa! None of those little things on four legs with room for two; no, it rises firm and massive from the floor, a large roomy terrace flanked on either side by a moderately high cabinet, above which again a smaller one mounts architecturally to the height of a man and puts a costly old jug out of mortal's reach. It was not surprising that there were so many old things at the Consul's, for his father and grandfather before him had taken rest and relaxation within these walls when work in the timber-yard and office was over.

The grandfather, Berendt Berendtsen Claudi, whose name the business still bore, had built the house and taken most interest in the shop and the produce-trade. The father had established the timber-trade, purchased arable land, built the barns and laid out the two gardens. The present Claudi devoted most of his energy to the corn-trade, had

built the granary, and combined his duties as English and Hanoverian vice-consul and agent for Lloyd's, with his position as merchant. The corn and the North Sea gave him so much to do that he could only bring an amateurish supervision to bear on the other branches of the business ; he had, therefore, divided them between a bankrupt cousin and a refractory old steward, who was always driving the Consul into a corner by asserting that the fields should be attended to whatever might happen to the mercantile part of the business, and that when he was going to plough, they might get horses to draw the timber as best they could, his, devil take him, they should not have ! But, as the fellow was capable, such things were overlooked.

Consul Claudi was slightly over fifty ; he was a handsome man with regular, strong, even coarse, features, which could as easily assume a look of energy and cool shrewdness as relax into an almost rakish expression of greedy, voluptuous enjoyment. He was equally in his element haggling with sharp country-folk, compounding with a troop of stubborn creditors, or sitting among hoary sinners over the last bottle of port, listening to more than questionable stories or telling them himself in the frankly vivid way for which he was famous.

This, however, was not the whole man.

One consequence of the training he had received was that on all questions outside those of a purely practical nature, he found himself on unfamiliar ground, but he did not, on that account, despise what he could not understand, nor did he make any



secret of the fact that it was so ; still less did he think of putting in his word or of demanding respect for his talk, on the ground that he was an older man, of more practical experience, and a higher rate-payer. On the contrary, he would sit and listen with an almost touching devotion to the conversation of ladies or young people on such subjects, now and again amid profuse apologies, putting a modest question, which nearly always met with a ready response ; and into his thanks for the answer he managed to throw that air of obligation that comes so well from an older to a younger person.

On the whole, at favourable moments, there was something surprisingly refined about Consul Claudi—a dissatisfied expression in his clear brown eyes, a melancholy smile about his firm mouth, and an inquiring, far-away tone in his voice ; it seemed as if he longed for some better world than the one in the power of which his friends and acquaintances believed him to be held fast.

Between this better world and him, his wife was the mediator. Hers was one of those pale, gentle, girlish natures, which have not the courage or, it may be, the instinct, to love out their love until, in the inmost depths of their souls, not an atom of self remains. They are never, not for the briefest moment, so far carried away as to dash themselves in reckless infatuation beneath the wheels of their idol's chariot. They cannot do this, but, otherwise, they will do anything for him they love ; they are capable of performing the hardest duties, they are ready for the most painful sacrifices, and no

humiliation is too great for them to bear. Such are the best of them.

No such great demands as these were made upon Fru Claudi, but her married life had not been wholly free from sorrow. It was an open secret in Fjordby that the Consul was not, or, at any rate, until a few years back, had not been the most faithful of husbands, and that he had several illegitimate children both in the town and out of it. This was naturally a great grief to her, and it had not been easy to force her heart to hold fast and not let go, in that tumult of jealousy, contempt and anger, of shame and sickening fear, which made her feel the firm ground slipping from beneath her feet. But she stood firm. Not only did no word of reproach cross her lips, but she prevented every attempt at confession on her husband's part, any open request for forgiveness, or anything that might seem like a repentant promise. She felt that if it came to words, she would be carried away from him, far away. It should be borne in silence, and in this silence she endeavoured to make herself accessory to her husband's guilt, by accusing herself of having set up about her a barricade which her love had not been strong enough to do away with. She succeeded in magnifying this crime of hers to such an extent that she was conscious of a vague need of forgiveness, and, in the course of time, she got so far that the report could arise that the girl Consul Claudi had seduced, as well as their children, were provided with many things besides money, and that they were protected and kept from

evil, guided and upheld, by the secret hand of a woman.

Thus it happened that evil was turned to good, and a sinner and a saint mutually benefited each other.

The Claudis had two children, a son who was in a counting-house in Hamburg, and a daughter of nineteen, called Fennimore, after the heroine in "St. Roche," a novel of Frau von Paalzow's which had been very popular in Fru Claudi's girlhood.

Fennimore and the Consul were down to meet the steamer the day that it brought Niels and Erik to Fjordby. Niels was pleasantly surprised to find his cousin pretty, for hitherto he had only known her from a dreadful old daguerreotype where, in an atmosphere of haze, she and her brother and their parents formed a family group, all of them with hectic carmine on their cheeks and heavy gilding on their jewellery. And now she looked so pretty as she stood there in her light morning-dress and small sandal-shoes with black ribbons crossed over the instep of her white stockings. She was standing with one foot on the edge of the pier, and, bending forward with a smile, she offered him the handle of her parasol to shake, before the steamer had properly come to a standstill. How red her lips were, how white her teeth, and how delicate the outlines of forehead and temples, as seen under the black, thickly-beaded lace that hung from the brim of her large Eugenie hat. At length the gangway was let down and the Consul went off with Erik, to whom he had introduced himself, when there was still

some twelve feet of water between them ; a moment later, he had involved him in a jocular conversation about the miseries of sea-sickness with a faded widow of his acquaintance, who was on board the steamer, and now he was busy directing his attention to the splendid lime-trees before the sheriff's house, and to the new schooner standing in the stocks in Thomas Rasmussen's dockyard.

Niels followed with Fennimore. She drew his attention to the fact that the flag was flying in the garden on the shore in honour of him and his friend, and then they went on to talk about the Neergaards. They were agreed at once that Fru Neergaard was rather—just a little—they did not say the word, but Fennimore assumed a prim smile and made a cat-like gesture, and this was evidently description enough, for they both smiled and then immediately grew grave again. They went on in silence, both engrossed in wondering what each thought of the other.

Fennimore had imagined that Niels Lyhne would be more imposing and have more decision in his manner, that he would be altogether more definitely characterised—like an underlined word. Niels, on the other hand, found much more than he had expected ; he found her charming, even bewitching, in spite of her dress, which displayed so much of the overdone smartness of the provincial lady. When, on entering the Consul's hall, she took her hat off and, looking down the while, arranged her hair with wonderfully graceful, languid turns of hand and wrist, he felt as grateful for these movements as if they were caresses, and

neither this day nor the next could he rid himself of this feeling of gratitude, puzzling even to himself. It was at times so strangely overpowering that it seemed to him nothing would make him happier than to thank her in words for being so pretty and so sweet.

Both Erik and Niels were soon at home in the Consul's hospitable house, and in the course of a few days were fully occupied with that pleasant lounging about which constitutes a genuine holiday and which it is so difficult to screen from the friendly interference of well-meaning people. They had to summon to their aid all the diplomatic abilities they possessed, to escape the stuffy evening parties, large boating excursions, summer balls and amateur performances, that were constantly threatening their peace. They wished that the Consul's house and garden lay on a desert island; and Robinson was not more terrified, when he found footprints in the sand, than they were when they saw strange paletots hanging in the hall or discovered unknown reticules on the sitting-room table. They would much rather have been alone, for, before the first week was half over, they were both in love with Fennimore. Not with that mature love which must and will know its fate, and yearns for the joys and the certainty of possession—they were not yet so far. It was only the dawn of that young love, which fills the air like a wondrous spring-time and surges up in our hearts with a yearning akin to sadness, with an unrest that is but the gentle throbbing of our happiness. Our hearts

are so tender, so easily moved, so ready for self-surrender. A light on the sea, the whispering of the leaves, even a flower unfolding its petals—everything has gained a strange power over us. Indefinite and nameless hopes burst suddenly forth, shedding sunshine over all the world, sunshine that vanishes as quickly as it comes ; a gentle breath of despair sails cloud-like across the glory, and its grey track blots out each ray of hope. Oh, so despondent, so bitterly despondent, resigned to our fate with such a melancholy joy ! Our heart overflows with self-compassion, with a resignation that revels in itself, is reflected in silent elegies, and expires in a sigh that is half feigned. . . . And again the roses whisper : the land of dreams emerges from the mist, a golden haze rests on the tender beech-tops, and fragrant summer shade lurks beneath branches that arch over paths, leading one knows not whither.

One evening, after tea, they were all together in the sitting-room. The garden, or any outdoor amusement was out of the question, for it was raining heavily. They were prisoners, but by no means discontented on that account. There was something of the cosiness of a winter evening in being shut up thus within four walls and, moreover, it was a good thing the rain had come, for everything was sadly in need of it. When it fell in torrents and the heavy drops beat against the frame of the reflecting mirror, the sound called up vague, fleeting pictures of luxuriant green fields and re-

freshed foliage, and one after the other exclaimed "How it rains!" at the same time looking at the panes with a feeling of satisfaction, even of pleasure, in tacit agreement with what was going on outside.

Erik fetched a mandoline that he had brought with him from Italy, and sang of Naples and shining stars; and now a young lady, who was there to tea, sat at the piano accompanying herself to the song, "My little nook among the mountains," ending each verse with a long "a," to make it sound properly Swedish.

Niels, who was not particularly musical, fell into rather a melancholy mood, and sat lost in thought until Fennimore began to sing.

That roused him.

But not agreeably; her singing filled him with uneasiness. She was no longer the little country girl when she abandoned herself to the sound of her voice. How she was carried away by these tones and how frankly and openly she breathed into them! He felt as if there were almost something unchaste about it; as if she were singing herself naked before him. His heart beat uncomfortably, his temples throbbed and he dropped his eyes. Did none of the others notice anything? No, none of them. She was quite carried away, far away from Fjordby, from Fjordby poetry and Fjordby feelings. She was transported to another, a more adventurous world, where the passions grow wild on lofty mountains and expose their scarlet blossoms to the storm.

Was it only because he knew so little of music that he heard so much in her singing ? He could not quite believe this, but he hoped it was so, for he liked her much better as she generally was. When she sat at her sewing, talking in her soft, calm voice and looking up with her clear, steadfast eyes, his whole being was drawn towards her with the irresistible force of a fierce and silent home-sickness. He longed to humble himself before her, to bend the knee and call her holy. A strange attraction drew him to her, not only as she was now, but as she had been in her childhood and in the days before he knew her ; and when they were alone he always managed to turn the conversation to the past, getting her to tell him about all the little troubles, errors and singularities of which every childhood is full. He lived in these recollections, and gave himself up to them with a restless jealousy, with a vague desire to seize, to share and to become one with these pale, delicate shadows of a life that had since turned to a richer and riper hue. And now to be roused of a sudden by this strangely powerful singing, which came as unexpectedly upon him as a wide expanse of country that comes in sight at a bend in the road, and reduces the pleasant bit of wood that formed our whole world to a corner of the landscape, making its delicate, irregular lines seem small and insignificant compared with the majestic sweep of the hills and distant moors ! Ah, but this landscape was but a *fata morgana*, what he had heard in her singing only his own fancy, for now she was her charming self again, talking as she always talked.



Did he not know, too, from a hundred things, that her nature was like a calm sheet of water, unruffled by wave or storm, and reflecting a heaven blue with stars?

It was thus that he loved Fennimore, thus that he saw her, and, as time went on, she adapted herself more and more to his conception of her. Not in conscious dissimulation, for, in a way, there was a good deal of truth in it, and it came natural to her, when his every word and expression, all his dreams and thoughts with their wishes, entreaties and homage touched just this chord of her nature—it came natural to her to be herself in the skin he, so to speak, forced upon her. It was impossible to be careful just now that each and every one got a true impression of her, when her thoughts were filled with one single person, with Erik, the only one, her chosen master, him whom she loved with a wildness that was foreign to her nature, and an idolatrous adoration that appalled her. She had always thought that love was something sweet and serious, not a consuming unrest, full of fear and humiliation and despair. Many a time when she thought she saw the confession of his love rising to Erik's lips, she felt as if it were her duty to lay her hand on his mouth and warn him against speaking, to accuse herself before him and say that she was deceiving him, to tell him how unworthy of his love she was, how petty and childish, how very, very ordinary, how miserably shallow and pitifully commonplace. She felt so false beneath his admiring glance, so calculating when she ceased

to avoid him, and so guilty when in her evening prayer she could not find it in her heart to beseech God to turn his heart from her, in order that there might be nothing but light about his path, light and majesty and splendour. For her low-born love would drag him down.

Erik loved her almost in spite of himself. His ideal had always been tall, proud and distinguished, with a quiet melancholy stamped upon its pale features, and the cool air of a temple in the severe folds of its garments ; but Fennimore's sweetness had vanquished him. He could not resist her beauty. A fresh, unconscious sensuousness lay over her whole figure. When she walked, her gait whispered of her form ; there was a certain nakedness about her movements, a dreamy eloquence in her repose. She could do nothing either for the one or the other, nor was it in her power to conceal and silence them, even had she been conscious of their presence. No one saw this better than Erik, and he knew very well how large a part her purely physical beauty played in the interest he felt for her. He struggled manfully, for his soul was full of high, enthusiastic ideas of love, ideas drawn not only from poetry and tradition, but also, perhaps, from deeper strata of his nature than those which generally found expression in his life. But no matter whence they sprang, they had to give way.

He had not yet confessed his love to Fennimore when it happened that the *Berendi Claudi* arrived and lay outside in the roads. She was to unload further up the fjord, therefore did not enter the

harbour, and, as the Consul was very proud of his schooner and wanted to show her to his guests, they rowed out one evening to have tea on board.

The weather was glorious, the sea perfectly calm, and they were all bent upon enjoying themselves. The time passed very pleasantly ; they drank English porter, tasted English cakes as large as moons, and ate salt mackerel that had been caught on the voyage across the North Sea. They worked the ship's pump until it foamed, rocked the compass, drew water from the water-barrels with the large iron siphon, and listened to the mate playing on an octagonal accordion.

It was quite dark before they were ready to return home.

They rowed in two parties ; Erik, Fennimore, and a couple of older people in the jolly-boat, the others in the Consul's own boat. The first boat was to row on ahead, first making a slight detour, and then running slowly in, while the other made for land in a straight line. The reason for this arrangement was that they wanted to hear how singing would sound across the water on such a quiet evening as this. Erik and Fennimore were therefore sitting together in the stern of the first boat, and had the mandoline with them. But the singing was quite forgotten, for when the oars were dipped in, it was seen that the phosphorescence on the water was unusually brilliant, and this took up all their attention. The boat glided gently forward and the dull, smooth surface was fluted with vanishing lines

and circles of soft, white light ; this light just illumined the line it formed, only where it was strongest casting a faint, dull glow immediately around it, like luminous smoke. It gleamed white on the oars and dropped off in trembling rings that grew fainter and fainter ; it splashed from the blades in glittering drops like a phosphorous rain that died out in the air, but set the water on fire as it fell. It was very still upon the fjord, and the rhythmical stroke of the oars seemed but to divide the silence into equal pauses. The grey twilight lay hushed and soft above the silent deep, and the boat and its occupants became a single dark mass, from which the faint gleam of the phosphorescence now and then set free the busy oars, a trailing rope, or the impassive brown face of a sailor. No one spoke ; Fennimore cooled her hand in the water ; she and Erik had turned round and were watching the phosphorescence, which noiselessly followed the boat, catching their thoughts in its glittering net.

A call for a song came from the shore ; this roused them, and they sang a couple of Italian romances together to the accompaniment of the mandoline.

Then it was still again.

At length they came alongside the little pier that ran out from the garden on the shore. The Consul's boat lay there empty, the others had gone up to the house. The two older people followed them, but Erik and Fennimore stood watching the boat rowing back to the ship. They heard the latch of the garden-gate fall, the sound of the oars grew fainter

and fainter, and the agitation of the water round the jetty died away. A breath of wind passed through the dark foliage like a sigh that had hidden itself there, and now gently raised the leaves and fled away, leaving them quite alone.

At the same moment they turned from the water to each other. Taking her hand, he drew her to him, slowly, questioningly, as it were, and kissed her. "Fennimore!" he whispered, and they went through the garden.

"You have known it a long time!" he said. She said "yes." They went on again and the latch fell once more.

After having coffee with them all and taking leave of the visitors at the front door, Erik escaped to his own room, but he could not sleep.

There seemed to be no air; he threw open the windows, flung himself on the sofa and listened.

He would go out again.

How noisy the house was! He could hear the Consul's slippers, and now Fru Claudi opened the kitchen-door to see if the fire were out. What could Niels be wanting in his box at this hour of night? Yes! . . . . A mouse behind the wainscotting! . . . . Now some one was walking about in stocking-soles. Indeed, there were two people. . . . At last! He opened the door of the spare room behind and listened; then, stealthily unfastening the window, he scrambled over the sill into the yard. He could get down to the shore-garden through the laundry. If any one saw him, he could say that he had left the mandoline down at the jetty and wanted to rescue it

from the dew. He was therefore carrying it on his back.

The garden was lighter now ; a slight breeze had risen and there was a small moon, which cast a quivering streak of silver from the jetty out to the *Berendt Claudi*.

The garden was protected by a sloping wall that ran out as far as the harbour-mole, enclosing, with sharp angles, a considerable piece of embankment. He went along this wall, balancing himself all the way out on the large, slanting stones.

He reached the end of the mole a little out of breath and sat down on a seat there.

High above his head, the red lanterns of the beacon were swaying to and fro with a melancholy sound of clinking chains and the flag-line was flapping gently against the flagstaff.

The moon had grown a little brighter, but not much, and shed a cautious, greyish light upon the motionless vessels in the harbour and the confusion of square roofs and white dark-eyed gables in the town. And further back, above it all, the church-tower rose bright and peaceful.

He leant dreamily back, and a wave of infinite joy and exultation rose in his heart, making him feel brimful of power and vitality. It seemed to him that Fennimore could hear each love-thought that sprang with twining tendrils and countless blossoms from his happiness, and rising, he passed his hand rapidly over his mandoline and sang in triumph to the slumbering town :

Wakeful lies my maiden,  
And listens to my song!  
Wakeful lies my maiden  
And listens to my song!

And, again and again, when his heart overflowed, he repeated the words of this old folk-song.

By degrees, he grew calmer; the memory of those hours in bygone days, when he had felt weakest, humblest and most forlorn, pressed forward with a keen and silent pain, like that which drives the first tears to our eyes. He sat down on the seat and, with his hand lying motionless upon the strings of the mandoline, gazed out over the broad expanse of steel-blue fjord. The glittering bridge of moonlight bore past the dark ship to the Morsø hills with their delicate, melancholy lines drawn by cloud-blue land through mists of white.

And his memories gradually grew less painful; they mounted to brighter lands and glowed, as it were, with a dawn of roses.

my maiden |

He sang it to himself :

Wakeful lies my maiden,  
And listens to my song!

## XI

THREE years have<sup>o</sup> elapsed ; Erik and Fennimore have been married for two, and are living in a small house on the Mariager Fjord. Niels has not seen Fennimore since that summer in Fjordby. He lives in Copenhagen and goes a great deal into society, but is intimate with no one except Dr. Hjerrild, who calls himself old, because grey threads are beginning to appear in his dark hair.

That unexpected engagement was a hard blow to Niels ; it has blunted him a little, and made him rather more bitter and suspicious, and he has not as much enthusiasm as of old to oppose to Hjerrild's despondency. He is faithful to his studies, but they are more aimless than they used to be, and the thought of being ready to step forth and put his shoulder to the wheel only flickers unsteadily. He lives in the midst of many people, but he does not live with them ; they are interesting enough to him, but he does not care in the least whether they are interested in him or not ; and he is conscious of a steady decline of the power within him, which ought to impel him to do his share, either with the others or against them. He can wait, he says, even if he must wait until it is too late. He who has faith



is in no hurry—that is his excuse ; for he feels that he has faith enough, if he once gets to the bottom of himself, faith enough to remove mountains, but he cannot make up his mind to set to work. Now and again he is seized with the creative impulse, with the desire to set part of himself free in a work of his own, and then, for days together, every nerve will be at a stretch with joyous Titanic efforts to amass the clay for his Adam. But he can never make him in the likeness of his image, he has not sufficient staying power to maintain the self-concentration that such an effort demands. He takes weeks to give up the work, but he does give it up, asking himself irritably why he should go on with it, and what more he has to gain by it. He has tasted the joys of conception ; the cares of fostering, nourishing, and bringing up are still to come—and why ? For whom ? He is no pelican, he says. But, say what he will, he is nevertheless dissatisfied, and feels that he has fallen short of the demands he makes upon himself ; and it is to no purpose that he sits in judgment upon these demands, and seeks to dispute the justice of their claim on him. He stands in the presence of two alternatives, and he has to choose ; for it is in the nature of things that, when our first youth is over, sooner or later—according to our different natures—sooner or later, the day dawns when resignation comes to us in the guise of a tempter, inciting us to say farewell to the impossible and rest content. And resignation has a great deal on its side, for how often the ideal claims of our youth are repulsed, our enthusiasms

put to shame, and our hopes laid waste! Our ideals, our bright, beautiful ideals have, as yet, indeed, lost nothing of their splendour, but they wander no longer on earth in our midst, as in the early days of our youth. They have been led back, step by step, up the broad-based stairs of wordly wisdom to the heaven from which our simple faith once drew them down. There they sit, radiant but afar off, smiling but weary, in divine inaction, while the incense of an inert and fitful adoration ascends in solemn clouds to their throne.

Niels Lyhne was tired; these incessant runs, preparatory to a leap that was never taken, had worn him out. Everything seemed hollow and worthless, perverted and confused, and oh, so trivial! It seemed natural to him to stop up ears and mouth, and plunge into studies which had nothing to do with the oppressive atmosphere of the world, but were like a quiet and secluded sea-bottom, with its peaceful forests of seaweed and curious animal life.

He was tired, and the tiredness had its root in his baffled love hopes, whence it had rapidly and surely spread through all his nature, through all his faculties and thoughts. He was cool and dispassionate enough now; but just at first—for some time after the blow had struck him—his love had increased from day to day with the irresistible power of a fever, and there had been times when his soul, in a frenzy of passion, had risen like a wave in infinite longing and foaming desire, risen and mounted higher and higher, until every fibre of

his brain, every cord of his heart was strained to its utmost tension. Then weariness would come, a dulling and soothing weariness that made his nerves deaf to pain, his blood too cold for excitement and his pulse too weak for action. And further still, it secured him against a relapse by giving him all the prudence and egoism of a convalescent, and, when he now looks back on the days in Fjordby, it is with the same sense of security that a person who has just come through a severe illness finds in the thought that now that his sufferings are over, and the fever has burnt to ashes in his body, he will be safe for a long, long time to come.

Then it was that, one summer day, when Erik and Fennimore, as beforesaid, had been married about two years, he received a half-pitiful, half-boastful letter from Erik, in which the latter accused himself of having wasted his time of late ; he didn't know how it was, but nowadays he never had a fresh idea. The people in the neighbourhood, with whom they associated, were bright and lively, not in the least prudish or stupid, but, as far as art was concerned, the veriest dromedaries. There was not a soul he could really talk to, and he had got into a state of indolence and aversion to work that he could not overcome, for he was never in the proper mood, never had ideas or inspirations as of old, and he was often very much afraid that it was all up with him and that he would never do anything again. But still it was impossible for it to go on like this for ever ; it would surely come back to him—he had been too rich for it to end thus—and *then* he would

show them what art was, those people who painted away as if it were something they had learned by heart. In the meantime, however, he seemed to be bewitched, and it would be an act of friendship on Niels' part to come to Mariager Fjord ; they would make him as comfortable as circumstances permitted, and he might just as well spend the summer there as anywhere else. Fennimore sent kind regards and would be very glad to see him.

This letter was most unlike Erik ; there must be something seriously wrong for him to complain in this way. Niels saw this at once, and he knew very well, too, how feeble the source of Erik's production was—only a tiny brook that might dry up altogether under unfavourable conditions. He would start immediately ; whatever had happened, Erik should find him a faithful friend and, though the years had severed ties and shattered illusions, he would at least know how to keep alive the friendship of their childhood. He had supported Erik before now ; he would do so again. A fanatic feeling of friendship came over him. He would renounce future, fame, ambitious dreams, everything in fact, for Erik's sake. All the smouldering inspirations and fermenting creative power that he possessed should be staked for Erik ; he would merge himself in Erik ; his personality and ideas, everything was ready, he would keep nothing for himself, and, in fancy, he saw the man who had encroached so roughly upon his life great and honoured, while he himself was blotted out, overlooked, bereft of worldly and spiritual possessions. And he dreamed, too, that

what he had given Erik ceased at length to be a loan and became the latter's very own by virtue of the stamp he gave it, when coining it into deed and work. Erik in honour and glory, he only one of the vast crowd of ordinary mortals—in truth, nothing more. Poor, in the end, not by choice, but of necessity ; a veritable beggar, and not a prince in rags . . . . and it was sweet to imagine himself so miserably insignificant.

But a dream is a dream, and he laughed at himself, reflecting that people who neglect their own affairs can very well afford to sacrifice any amount of interest to the work of others ; and he knew, too, that when they stood face to face, Erik would naturally deny his letter, laugh it off, and think it extremely ludicrous if he really went and announced that he was prepared to help him back to his talent. However, he set off ; in his heart of hearts he believed that he could be of service and, moreover, seek as he would to be sceptical and to explain it away, he could not rid himself of the feeling that, despite the years and what the years had brought in their train, the old friendship of their boyhood had come to life again in all its naïve fervour.

\* \* \* \* \*

The house on the Mariager Fjord belonged to an elderly couple who, on account of their health, had been compelled to take up their residence in the South for an indefinite period. When they left they had only intended to be absent for six months, and therefore, not expecting to let the house, they had left everything just as it was ; and when Erik took

it completely furnished, this was the case in such a literal sense that with it he got nicknacks, family-portraits—everything, in fact, that was in it, including a lumber-room full of rubbish and old letters in the drawers of the writing-table.

Erik had discovered the place on leaving Fjordby after his engagement. As everything they needed, and even more than that, was forthcoming here, and as he intended in the course of a year or two to settle down in Rome, he had persuaded the Consul to postpone buying the trousseau, and they had gone to Marianelund as they would have gone to a hotel, except that they had a little more luggage than the generality of travellers.

The house stood facing the fjord, not twenty feet from the water. It was a very ordinary-looking house, with a balcony above and a verandah below, and behind it a newly made garden, in which the trees were not much thicker than walking-sticks. To make up for this, however, you could step out of the garden into a magnificent beech forest with open patches of heath and low-lying hollows between clay hills.

Such was Fennimore's new home, and, for a time, it was as bright as happiness could make it, for were they not young and in love with each other, in the best of health and spirits, and as easy on the score of spiritual as of material needs?

But every castle of happiness that is erected rests upon a foundation that is partly sand, and the sand collects and runs out under the walls, slowly perhaps—it may be, imperceptibly—but it runs and

runs, grain by grain. . . . And love?—neither is love a rock, however ready we are to believe it.

She loved him with all her heart, with tremulous ardour and passionate anxiety; he was more than a god to her, far more—an idol that she worshipped without measure and without reserve.

His love was as strong as hers, but it lacked that delicate, manly tenderness that defends the loved woman against herself and watches over her dignity. There was something, it is true, that admonished him like a dim sense of duty, that called to him like the whisper of a voice, but he would not hear, for she was so bewitching in her blind love, and her beauty—the unguarded charms and submissive grace of a slave—goaded and spurred him on to a passion that knew neither bounds nor mercy.

In the old myth of Amor, are we not told somewhere that he lays his hand upon Psyche's eyes, before they rush forth in a transport of ecstasy into the glowing night?

Poor Fennimore! If only she could have been consumed by the fire in her own heart, which he, who ought to have protected her, had blown to flames! For he was like that drunken ruler who, with the incendiary torch in his hand, exulted to see his capital burn, the spectacle of the playing flames heightening his intoxication until the ashes sobered him.

Poor Fennimore! She did not know that the rapturous hymn of happiness may be sung so often that it finally loses both words and melody and becomes mere trivial babble; she did not know that

the transport which exalts us to-day takes its strength from the wings of the morrow ; and when, at length, the gloomy dawn of sobriety was breaking, she began to understand in fear and trembling that they had loved until their love had sunk to a sweet contempt for themselves and for each other, a contempt that, day by day, lost some of its sweetness, until at length it was bitterness itself. They turned away from each other as much as possible, he to dream of a disappointed ideal of disdainful majesty and chilling grace, she to gaze with the longing of despair at the pale, calm shore of her girlhood, now so immeasurably distant. Her life grew daily more unbearable ; shame burnt fiercely in her veins, and the sickening disgust she felt for herself made everything seem ill-fated and hopeless. There was a small empty room that contained nothing but the boxes she had brought with her from home, and here she often sat for hours at a time, until the sun sank below the horizon, filling the room with reddish light. Here she martyred herself with thoughts sharper than thorns, and lashed herself with words more stinging than scourges, until, dazed with grief and agony, she sought to deaden her pain by flinging herself on the floor, like a thing full of nauseous dregs and corruption—a carcase of herself, too loathsome to be tenanted by a soul. . . . Her husband's mistress ! This thought was always in her heart ; with it she contemptuously threw her inmost self in the dust at her feet, with it she barred out every hope of redress and petrified every happy memory.



By degrees a hard, a brutal indifference came over her, and she ceased to despair as she had ceased to hope ; her heaven had fallen in and she felt no desire to rebuild its vault in her dreams. She made no demands on a higher bliss ; she was not too good for the world nor the world for her ; they were worthy of each other. She bore Erik no malice, nor did she shrink from him in terror ; on the contrary, she accepted his kisses, having too great a contempt for herself to evade them, and then, was she not his wife, the wife of a man ?

For Erik, too, the awakening was bitter, although, with the prosaic far-sightedness of a man, he had said to himself that this was bound to happen some day. But when it did happen, when love could no longer make up for all privations, and the glittering veil of gold in which it had descended to him on earth was blown away, he felt his energy relax and his faculties decline. This angered and alarmed him and made him turn to his art with a feverish zeal, to make sure whether or no he had forfeited anything else besides happiness. But he did not receive the answer for which he hoped ; he hit on a few unfortunate ideas and, although he made no progress with them, he could not persuade himself to give them up altogether. He could make nothing of them, and yet they continued to occupy his time, hindering other ideas from coming forward and attracting his attention. He grew discontented and discouraged, and sank into a state of brooding indolence, for his work was tiresomely perverse, and he thought he only needed to wait for the

proper spirit to return to him. But time went on and things did not improve, his talent continued barren, and here, by the quiet fjord, there was nothing in his intercourse with those around him to exert a fruitful influence upon him, nor were there any fellow-artists whose triumphs might have incited him either to emulation or productive opposition. This inactivity grew unbearable and he was seized with a passionate desire to realise his individuality, no matter how or by what means this end was to be attained. As no other opportunity presented itself, he began to frequent a circle of landowners of varying ages, who, under the leadership of a hunting squire of sixty, enlivened the monotony of country life with such dissipations as could be devised by imaginations not of the strongest and strictly limited by rather one-sided tastes. The real kernel of their dissipations was drink and cards, and remained pretty much the same, whether the shell that surrounded it was called a hunting party or a market journey. Nor did it make any appreciable difference if, now and again, the scene was laid at one of the neighbouring market towns and real or imaginary business transacted with the tradesmen there in the course of the afternoon, for the final settlement always took place in the evening at the inn, where the landlord, with great discernment, showed all people of the right colour to a safe place. If travelling actors were in the town, the tradesmen were thrown over, for the actors were not only more sociable and less backward with regard to the bottle, but, as a rule, quite ready to

submit to the miraculous cure—unfortunately, not always carried out with complete success—of drinking themselves sober in Geneva after they had got drunk on champagne.

The mainstay of this circle consisted of country gentlemen and small landowners of all ages, but it also included a coarse young puppy of a brandy-distiller, and a white-necked tutor, who had not been a tutor for at least twenty years; the latter spent his time visiting his acquaintances, and was always accompanied by a sealskin travelling-bag and a grey nag, which he was jokingly said to have stolen from a horse-butcher. He was a silent toper, a great virtuoso on the flute, and was supposed to know Arabic. To what the squire called his staff belonged also an attorney, who was always telling fresh stories, and a doctor who only knew one, about the siege of Lübeck in the year six.

This circle extended far and wide, and it practically never happened that all its members met together at one time. If, however, any one absented himself over long, remaining at home, the squire issued a summons to all the faithful, and they repaired to inspect the renegade's oxen, which really meant that they quartered themselves upon the unfortunate man for two or three days, as far as possible turning his house upside down with gambling and carousing and such other rural diversions as the season permitted. It happened once, on such a visit of correction, that the whole party stayed so long that their host gradually ran out of coffee, rum and sugar, and they had at last to be con-

tented with a coffee-punch, made of chicory, sweetened with treacle and strengthened with brandy.

On the whole, it was a sorry, coarse-grained band that Erik had fallen in with ; but people of such enormous vitality would certainly not have found a vent for their spirits in more civilised amusements, and their inexhaustible humour and hearty, bear-like good nature really compensated for much of their coarseness. Had Erik's talent only been akin to Brouwer's or Ostade's, this select gathering of boon-companions would have been a perfect gold-mine to him ; but, as it was, the only profit that he or any of the others derived from it was that of thorough-going enjoyment. Only too thorough—for this wanton dissipation soon became indispensable to him, and gradually took up all his time ; and though he now and then reproached himself for his inactivity, and resolved to put an end to it, the sense of blankness and mental impotence that overcame him whenever he tried to work, always drove him back to the old life.

He had written to Niels one day, when this continued unproductiveness appeared to him in the light of a wasting disease that had attacked his talent, but he regretted his letter as soon as it was sent off, and hoped that Niels would let his complaints go in at one ear and out at the other.

But Niels, the knight-errant of friendship in person, came, and was received with the half-cool, half-compassionate welcome that knight-errants have always received from those on whose behalf they

lead Rosinante out of the warm stable. As, however, Niels was cautious, and bided his time, Erik soon thawed, and the old confidence between them awakened once more. And something that almost resembled a physical force impelled Erik to pour out his heart in complaints and confessions.

One evening—it was past bedtime and Fennimore had retired to rest—they were sitting over their toddy in the dark. Only the glow of their cigars showed where they were, and now and again, when Niels leaned back in his chair, his upturned profile stood out black against the dark window-panes. They had been talking about the old days at Lönborggaard, when they were boys together, and drinking rather freely, especially Erik. After Fennimore's departure a pause ensued, which neither of them felt inclined to break; their thoughts came smoothly trundling along, as they drowsily listened to the blood, heated by what they had drunk, singing in their ears.

"How foolish we are at twenty!" It was Erik's voice. "Heaven knows what it was we expected, or how we had got it into our heads that there was anything to expect! It's true, we used the same names as the real things bear, but what we meant was something far beyond comparison with the empty lot that actually fell to us. There's not much in life after all, is there?"

"Oh, I don't know; I take it for what it's worth. As a rule, you know, we can do no more. Most of the time we only exist. If we could have our life served out to us in the shape of a large,

appetising cake, at which we could hack away . . . . but in bits like this!—it's uninteresting."

"Tell me, Niels—it is only with you that one gets on such ridiculous subjects; I don't know how it is, but you have such an odd way with you. Tell me—have you anything in your glass?—Right!—Have you ever thought of death?"

"I! Oh, yes, have you?"

"I don't mean at funerals, or when one is ill, but so...times, when I am sitting here as comfortably as possible, a feeling of something like . . . . well, just like despair comes over me. Here I sit and mope and get nothing done, *can* get nothing done, and at such moments I seem to realise how time is slipping from me. Hours, weeks, months rush past with nothing in them, and I am unable to nail them to the spot with a piece of work. I don't know if you will understand what I mean; of course, it's only a sort of feeling I have, but I would like to have a hold on time with something that I had achieved. You see, the time it takes to paint a picture is always mine, or else I get something out of it; it is not gone for good, just because it is past. I grow quite sick when I think how the days are going by—incessantly. And I *have* nothing, or else I cannot get at what I have. It is torture; sometimes I get so enraged that I have to walk up and down and sing some idiotic thing or other to keep from crying with irritation; and then I almost go mad, when I pause again and think that meanwhile time has passed and is passing even while I think, always passing. Nothing is more wretched than to be an

artist. Here am I, strong and well ; I can see ; my blood is warm and rich ; my heart beats, there is nothing wrong with my intellect, and I *want* to work. But I can't, all the same ; I strive to grasp something invisible, which is not to be grasped, which no exertions on my part could procure me, though I toiled till the blood gushed from the quicks of my nails. What is one to do for an inspiration, to get an idea ? I may pull myself together as much as I please ; I may try to appear as if nothing were the matter, and go out and look about me without any object, but no ! It's always the same, nothing ever comes of it ! Only the consciousness that Time is standing out there in Eternity, immersed to the waist, and hauling in the hours as they glide past—twelve white and twelve black—unceasingly, unceasingly. What am I to do ? Surely something can be done in such a case ; I cannot be the first. Can you suggest nothing ? ”

“Travel.”

“No, no, anything but that, what made you think of it ? You surely don't think it's all over with me ? ”

“Over with you ? No ! What I meant was that the new impressions . . . . ”

“The new impressions ! That's just it. You must have heard of people who had plenty of talent as long as they were in their first youth and sound and well, and full of hopes and plans, but when their youth went, their talent went, too—and never returned.”

He was silent for a long time.

"They travelled, Niels, in search of new impressions. That was their fixed idea. The South, the East, it was all in vain, leaving no more trace upon them than an image leaves in a mirror. I have seen their graves in Rome. Two of them, but there are many, many. . . . One went mad."

"I've never heard that about painters before."

"It's a fact. What do you think it can be? A secret nerve that has given way? Or are we ourselves to blame for it? Something we have failed to do or done amiss, perhaps—who knows? A soul is such a fragile thing, and no one knows *how* far a man's soul reaches. We ought to be gentle with ourselves. . . . Niels, old fellow!" his voice had grown low and soft. "Sometimes I feel so used up that I, too, have this longing for travel. I have it to a degree of which you can form no idea, but it seems to me that I dare not do it, for, suppose it were no use, and I were one of those people of whom I was telling you! What then? Just think, if I were to stand face to face with the certainty that it was all over with me, that not the smallest fragment was left me, that I was incapable of doing anything—think of it, incapable!—a pitiful specimen of humanity, an accursed hound of a cripple, an emasculated wretch! What do you think I should sink to? And, you see, it would be by no means impossible. I'm past my first youth, and I certainly haven't many illusions and things of that sort. It's dreadful how we waste them, and yet I was never one of those people who are glad to be rid of them. I wasn't like the rest of you that went to Fru Boye's ;



you were in such a hurry to pull out each other's fine feathers, and, the barer you grew, the more conceited you were. But it all comes to the same thing in the end ; we have to moult once, at any rate."

They were silent. The air was bitter with cigar-smoke and nauseous with brandy ; their breath came hard in the close atmosphere of the room and they sighed from the depths of their hearts.

There sat Niels, who had travelled sixty miles to be of assistance, there he sat ashamed of the colder side of his nature. For what could he do when it came to the point ? Should he talk to Erik in a picturesque manner, using words of purple and ultramarine, dripping with light and wading in shadow ? An idea of this sort had been in his mind when he left home. How ludicrous it was ! Assistance ! It may, perhaps, be possible to chase away the goddess with the empty hands from an artist's door, but that is, after all, the utmost one can do ; it is no more possible to help him with artistic creation than it would be to make him raise his little finger by himself if he were paralysed. No, not although our heart were overflowing with sympathy and self-sacrifice and every other generous feeling ! Mind our own business, that is what we ought to do ; it is a wholesome and useful occupation, but it would undoubtedly be easier to be a person of unlimited sentiment, sympathising with the world at large. The only objection is that it is so exceedingly impracticable and so disappointing in its lack of results. Mind our own business and mind it

well—we should hardly be saved on the strength of this precept, but we should need to lower our eyes before no one, neither God nor man.

Niels had ample opportunity to indulge in despondent reflections on the powerlessness of a kind heart, for the only good he did was to keep Erik more at home than usual for the space of a month or two. However, he had no desire to return to Copenhagen in the very middle of summer, but neither did he wish to be their guest for ever ; he therefore took lodgings with a family slightly above the peasant-class, on the other side of the fjord, not so far distant from Marianelund but what he could row over in a quarter of an hour. He might just as well be here as anywhere else ; besides, he knew the neighbourhood now, and he was one of those people who are easily taken captive by the surroundings of a place ; and then, had he not his friend here and his cousin Fennimore ? There were reasons enough, especially as not a single person was expecting him elsewhere.

On his journey over, he had carefully thought out how he would act towards Fennimore ; he would show her, for instance, that he had so completely forgotten, that he did not even remember there was anything to forget ; above all, no coldness, but rather a cordial indifference, a superficial friendliness and polite sympathy. This was how it should be.

All this, however, was superfluous.

The Fennimore he found was very different from the one he had left. She was still pretty, her figure had lost none of its luxuriant beauty, and she had

the same slow, languid movements he had admired of yore ; but the expression of mournful vacancy about her mouth was that of one who has thought overmuch, and there was a tortured look of cruelty in her soft eyes that was pitiful to see. He could not understand it at all, but this much, at any rate, was clear to him, that she had had something else to do than to remember him, and that she was quite insensible to the memories he might awaken. She appeared like one who had made her choice, and now looked at everything in the worst possible light.

By degrees he began to spell it out and put things together, and one day when they were walking on the beach, he began to understand.

Erik was putting his studio in order, and as Niels and Fennimore were walking by the water, the servant came down with an apronful of rubbish, which she threw on to the beach. Old paint-brushes, broken palette-knives, fragments of casts, cracked oil-bottles and empty colour-tubes—a miscellaneous heap. Niels turned it over with his foot, and Fennimore looked on with the vague hope of discovery that one always feels at the sight of old rubbish. Suddenly Niels drew his foot back, as if he had burnt himself, thought better of it at once, however, and hastily went on turning the things over.

"Oh, let me see it!" said Fennimore, laying her hand on his arm, as if to check him.

He bent down and picked up the plaster-cast of a hand holding an egg. "It must be a mistake," he said.

"No, it is broken, you see," she said quietly, taking it out of his hand. "Look, the forefinger is gone!" she pointed; but perceiving at the same moment that the egg was cut through the middle and the yolk painted in in yellow, she reddened a little and, bending forward, slowly and deliberately broke the hand into small pieces against a stone.

"Do you remember the time it was cast?" asked Niels, for the sake of saying something.

"I remember my hand being rubbed with green soap, so that the plaster should not stick to it. Is that what you mean?"

"No, I mean the evening Erik passed the cast of your hand round the tea-table. Don't you remember how, when it came to your old aunt, her eyes filled with tears, and drawing you to her with heartfelt sympathy, she kissed you on the forehead as if some injury had been done to you."

"Yes, people are so sentimental."

"Ah, no! We laughed at her, it is true, but there was something delicate about the action, all the same, even though it was so meaningless."

"Yes, there's a great deal of such meaningless delicacy in the world."

"I believe you wish to quarrel with me."

"No, I don't, but there is something I should like to say to you. You won't be vexed, I'm sure, at a little frankness! Well, tell me now, do you not think that when, for example, a man tells rather a coarse story in his wife's presence, or when, in your opinion, he is perhaps a little inconsiderate towards

her, don't you think it is quite unnecessary for you to protest against such a thing by making yourself out to be excessively nice of feeling and overpoweringly chivalrous? It must surely be admitted that a man knows his own wife best, and knows, too, that it will neither do her harm nor hurt her feelings; otherwise, of course, he wouldn't do it. Isn't that so?"

"No, it's certainly not so, as a general rule, but in this case, and on your authority, I suppose I may say yes."

"Yes, that's right. You may rest assured that women are not such ethereal beings as many a good young man imagines. Their feelings are really no nicer than a man's, in fact they are in no wise different from men. Believe me, the clay of which both were formed was a little dirty."

"Fennimore, dear, you don't know, thank goodness, what you are saying, but you are very unjust to women, to yourself. I believe in woman's purity."

"Woman's purity! What do you mean by woman's purity?"

"I mean . . . well . . . ."

"You mean—just let me tell you, you don't mean anything, for this is more of that meaningless delicacy. A woman *cannot* be pure, she is not meant to be—how could she? How unnatural! Did her Creator intend her to be pure? Answer me!—No, and ten thousand times no! It is utterly absurd! Why will you exalt us to the stars with

one hand when, with the other, you must drag us down? Can you not let us walk side by side with you on earth as fellow-mortals and nothing else? It is absolutely impossible for us to step out confidently on prose, when you blind us with your will-o'-the-wisps of poetry. Let us alone, for God's sake, let us alone!"

She sat down and wept.

Niels understood a great deal; Fennimore would have been unhappy had she known how much. Was it not in part the old story of the banquet of love which will not serve as daily bread but remains a banquet, becoming, however, day by day more sickly and insipid and less and less nourishing? And the one cannot work the miracle nor yet the other, and there they sit, still in their wedding-garments, careful to keep on smiling at each other and to use ceremonious words; inwardly, however, they suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst and soon begin to avoid each other's eyes, for malice is springing up in their hearts. Was it not this in the first place, and then, too, the other equally sad story of a woman's despair at not being able to take herself back, when she discovers that the demi-god, whose bride she so joyfully became, is only a very ordinary mortal? At first, despair, useless despair and then a useful indifference—was this not it? He thought it was, and now he understood it all, the hardness in her manner, the bitter humility, and the bluntness, which was to her the bitterest drop in the whole cup. He realised, too, by degrees, how burdensome and irritating his consideration and

respectful homage must be to her ; for a woman who has been hurled on to the pavement from the purple bed of her dreams, almost finds it in her heart to hate any one who would spread a carpet over the stones. In her first bitterness she is determined to feel the hardness in all its intensity ; not satisfied with going her way on foot, she drags herself along on her knees, choosing just those places where the road is steepest and the stones are sharpest. She desires neither hand nor help, nor will she raise her head, however heavy it may grow ; she will bend her face to the very dust and taste it with her tongue.

Niels was very sorry for her, but he left her in peace as she desired.

It was so hard to see her suffer and not be allowed to help her ; to stand afar off, dreaming in foolish dreams that she was happy, or else to wait and calculate with the shrewd coolness of a doctor, telling himself with mournful wisdom that no relief was possible, until her old hopes of the resplendent riches of life had bled to death and a more sluggish life-stream pulsed through all the veins of her being—until she was blunt enough to forget, dull enough to be content, and, finally, coarse enough to be happy in a foggy sphere of bliss, many heavens lower than the one she had set her heart on, and tremblingly prayed for wings to reach. He felt disgusted with the whole world when he thought of her, before whom in his heart he had once knelt in humble adoration, being forced to stoop so low ; when he thought of her laid in the chains of slavery, or

standing freezing by the wayside, while he rode by on horse, with the large money of life jingling in his pockets.

One Sunday afternoon towards the end of August, Niels rowed across the fjord. He found Fennimore at home by herself. She was lying on the sofa in the corner room, uttering with every breath the faint, short moans that seem to ease our pain when we are ill. She had such a terrible headache, she said, and there was not a soul at home to help her; the servant had got leave to go home to Hadssund, and shortly after she went, some one had come to fetch Erik. She could not think where they had gone in such rain. She had been lying here now for an hour or two, trying to sleep, but it was not to be thought of, owing to the pain. She had never had it before and it had come on so suddenly—at midday she was quite well—first, in her temples and then further and further in, until it seemed to be behind her eyes. If only it were nothing serious! She was not at all used to being ill, and felt very alarmed and unhappy.

Niels consoled her as well as he could. He said she must lie still, close her eyes, and not talk; he found a thick shawl to wrap her feet in, fetched vinegar from the sideboard, and prepared a wet compress, which he laid on her forehead. This done, he sat down quietly at the window and looked out at the rain.

From time to time he stole over to her on tip-toe and changed the compress without speaking, merely



nodding to her when she looked gratefully up from beneath his hands. Sometimes she wanted to speak, but he prevented all such attempts with a shake of the head and a gentle hush. Then he returned to his place again.

At last she fell asleep.

One hour passed and then another, and still she slept on. One quarter glided slowly into another, while the melancholy daylight grew less and less; the shadows in the room gradually increased, and stood out from walls and furniture. And outside, the rain continued steadily and incessantly, deadening every other sound with its monotonous whish.

Still she slept.

The fumes of the vinegar and the vanilla-perfume of the heliotropes on the window-sill combined to form a sourish, wine-like odour; it filled the air, which, warm with their breath, cast upon the greyish panes a film that grew denser as the coolness of the evening increased.

Niels was far away by now, in dreams and memories, although all the time a part of his consciousness kept watch over the sleeper and guarded her slumber. Little by little, as the twilight deepened, his imagination grew weary of fostering the dreams that flared up and died away in unending succession—just as the soil grows weary of always bearing the same crop. The dreams became fainter and more barren, their wealth of detail vanished, they grew less flexible, and lost their branching and curiously twining tendrils. His

mind relaxed its hold of everything afar off and turned homewards. How still it was! As if they two, he and she, were on an island of silence that rose above the rain's monotonous sea of sound. And their souls were silent, silent and at rest, and the future seemed to slumber in a cradle of peace.

Oh, that it might never waken and everything could remain as it was! No happiness but the happiness of peace, but then, too, no sorrow or ceaseless unrest. If only this moment of their lives would close upon itself, as a bud is closed—and no spring come!

Fennimore called to him; she had been lying awake for some time, so thankful to be free from pain that she had not thought of speaking. Now she wished to rise and light the lamp, but Niels continued to act the doctor and made her remain on the sofa. It would not be good for her to get up yet; he had matches and would easily find the lamp.

When he had lighted it, he placed it on the flower-stand in the corner, and the opaque, round globe was half hidden by the delicate, slumbering foliage of an acacia; there was just enough light in the room for them to see each other's faces.

He sat down before her and they talked about the rain, saying what a good thing it was that Erik had his waterproof with him, and how wet poor Trine would get. Then the conversation came to a standstill.

Fennimore's thoughts were still a little sleepy, and a general sense of tiredness made it very plea-

sant to lie there and half think without speaking. Niels was not in a talkative mood either, being still under the influence of the long silence of the afternoon.

"Do you like this house?" said Fennimore at last.

Oh yes, he liked it.

"Do you? Do you remember the furniture at home?"

"At Fjordby? Yes, quite distinctly."

"How I love it, and how I sometimes long for it! What we have here is not our own, of course, it is only hired and is absolutely nothing to us; it does not awaken a single memory in our hearts, and we shall only live with it as long as we are here. This will seem odd to you perhaps, but I assure you I often feel so lonely amongst all this strange furniture, which stands here in stupid indifference and accepts me as I am, without caring in the least about me. And as it will not go with me, but just remain here until others come to hire it, I, on my part, find it impossible to become intimate with it or to take an interest in it, as I might, if I knew that my home would always be its home, and that whatever good or ill befell me would find me in its midst. Do you think this childish? Perhaps it is, but I cannot help it."

"I don't know what it is, but I had the same feeling myself, when I was alone abroad. My watch would not go, and when I got it back from the watchmaker and it was going again, it seemed . . . well, just as you say. I was glad to have

it, there was something peculiar in the feeling—something very pleasant.”

“Yes, exactly! I should have kissed it had I been you.”

“Would you?”

“Tell me,” she said suddenly, “you have never told me anything of Erik as a boy. What was he like?”

“He was everything that was good and true, Fennimore. Noble and brave, a boy’s ideal of a boy in every respect, not exactly the ideal of a mother or a teacher, but that other, which is so much better.”

“How did you get on? Were you very fond of each other?”

“Well, you see, it was something like this: I was very much in love with him, and he had no objection; we were so different from each other, you know. I always wanted to be a poet, and become famous; but can you imagine what he said when I asked him one day what he would like best to be? An Indian, a real red Indian, with war paint, and all the rest of it. I remember not being able to understand it at all; my highly civilised mind could not imagine any one wishing to be a savage.”

“But was it not strange, then, that he chose to be an artist?” said Fennimore, and there was something cold and hostile about the tone in which she asked.

Niels noticed it, and was startled. “Oh, no,” he said, “people rarely become artists with their

whole nature. And just such cheerful, confident mortals as Erik often have an infinite craving for what is delicate and fine, for—I hardly know how to express it—for a delicate, maiden-like reserve, for the exquisitely sublime. Outwardly, they may be robust and full-blooded enough—indeed, even coarse—and no one suspects what strange, romantic and sentimental secrets they have with themselves, for these great heavy-footed men are so bashful—spiritually bashful, I mean, of course—that no pale young maiden could be shyer with regard to her feelings than they are. Do you not understand, Fennimore, that a secret of this sort, which cannot be put into plain language and said outright in the prosaic atmosphere of every day, may make a man an artist? And they cannot put it into words, Fennimore, they cannot; one must just believe that it is there, living quietly within them, like a bulb beneath the ground, which now and then sends up to the light its fragrant, rich-hued wealth of flowers. You understand that you must demand none of this power of blossoming for yourself? Believe in it, and be happy to foster it, and to know that it exists. Don't be angry with me, Fennimore, but I fear that you and Erik are not exactly kind to each other. Can it not be otherwise? Do not ask yourself who is in the right, or brood over the enormity of the wrong done; you must not be just to him, for where would the best of us be if it came to justice? No, think of him as he was in the hour when you loved him best; believe me, he is worthy of it. You must not measure or weigh; in love, I know, there

are moments of bright, solemn ecstasy when, if necessary, we would give our life for the loved one. Am I not right? Think of this, Fennimore, and remember it, for his sake, as well as your own!"

He was silent.

She, too, said nothing; she lay still with a mournful smile about her lips, pale as a blossom.

Then, half-rising, she held out her hand to Niels.

"Will you be my friend?" she said.

"I am your friend, Fennimore," and he took her hand.

"Will you, Niels?"

"Always," he answered, raising her hand reverently to his lips.

Then he rose, and it seemed to Fennimore that he was straighter than she had ever seen him before.

Shortly afterwards Trine came in to announce that she was back, and then came tea, and finally a row in the cheerless rain.

It was early morning before Erik came home. When Fennimore saw him preparing for bed, in the cold, truth-loving light of day, saw him heavy and unsteady with drink, with eyes glassy from play, and face dirty and pale from the sleepless night, the beautiful words that Niels had spoken seemed wholly fantastic, and the radiant vows she had made to herself grew pale, and vanished before the growing day: vain thoughts and illusive dreams—a noble troop of lies.

What was the good of struggling when they were

both weighed down by such a hopeless burden? This airy self-deception was futile ; their life would never go on springs again. The frost had come, and the profusion of creepers and creeping tendrils, with the clusters of roses and still fairer flowers that encircled and bound them together, had shed each little leaf, lost every blossom ; all that remained were the tough, naked withes which held them fast in an inextricable tangle. What was the use of awakening with the warmth of memories, the feelings of bygone days to artificial life, of setting her idol upon his pedestal again, and calling up the light of admiration to her eyes, words of adoration to her lips and the crimson of happiness to her cheeks—what was the use of it all, if *he* would not take upon himself to be the priest of this idol, and help her with a pious fraud ? He ! He did not even recognise her love again ; not one of her words had lingered in his ear, not a single day of their days together had been treasured in his soul.

No, their hearts' rapturous love was still and dead ; all its light and fragrance and quivering tones had died away, and yet, from sheer force of habit, they would sit there side by side, he with his arm round her waist, she with her head resting upon his shoulder ; they would sit wrapped in profound silence, forgetful of one another, she, lost in remembrance of the hero of her dreams, which he, after all, had never been, he, transforming her in fancy into that ideal of his which was now only to be seen resplendent amid the clouds, high above her head. Such was their life together, and the

days came and went bringing no change ; day after day they gazed out across life's desert, saying to themselves that it *was* a desert, that there were no flowers, nor any prospect of flowers, or springs, or green palms.

Erik's drinking-bouts became more and more frequent as autumn advanced. What was the use, he said to Niels, of sitting at home waiting for ideas that never came, until his thoughts turned to stone in his head ? Besides, Niels' society did not afford him much consolation ; he needed people with some life in them, people who were noisy flesh and blood, and not the plaything of weak nerves. Niels and Fennimore were, therefore, often alone with each other, for Niels went over to Marianelund every day.

The covenant of friendship they had concluded that Sunday evening, and the words that had passed between them, had made them more unconstrained with each other and put their relations on a surer footing. In the solitude of their lives a warm and intimate friendship arose, which soon gained a great hold upon them, occupying their minds to such an extent that, whether they were together or apart, their thoughts were always running on this bond of friendship, just as birds building at the same nest look at everything—what they collect and what they discard—with the one pleasant object in view of making the nest soft and warm for each other and for themselves.

If Erik were out when Niels came over, no matter whether it rained or blew, they almost always went



for a long walk in the wood adjoining the garden. They had grown deeply attached to this wood, and the nearer its summer-life drew to a close, the more they loved it. Besides, were there not countless things to be seen there? First, how the leaves grew yellow and red and brown, then how they fell; how on a windy day they drifted in yellow crowds, but when it was still, came gently rustling down, leaf by leaf, leaf after leaf, amidst stiff branches and lithe brown twigs. And, as the leaves fell from trees and bushes, how wonderfully the hidden mysteries of the summer came to light, what pretty seeds and brilliant berries were scattered everywhere! Brown nuts, smooth acorns and dainty acorn-cups, tufts of coral on the barberry-bushes, shiny black sloes and scarlet urns on the dog-rose. The leafless beeches were dotted with prickly beech nuts, and the mountain-ash bent beneath heavy scarlet clusters, which had a sourish perfume like apple-cider. Late brambles lay black and brown in the damp foliage by the wayside, whortle-berries were to be found among the heather, and wild raspberries bore their second crop of dull red fruit. The ferns turned a hundred different colours as they withered, and, as for the moss, it was a veritable discovery! Not only the hardy club-moss that grew in the hollows and on the slopes, and sometimes looked like fir trees, palms, or ostrich feathers, but the delicate moss on the tree-trunks, which was just what one would imagine the fairies' cornfields to be like, springing up as it did in fine, fine blades, with dark brown knobs at the tips like ears of corn.

They scoured the wood in all directions, eager as children to discover its curiosities and treasures. Like children, too, they divided it between them, everything on one side of the carriage-road belonging to Fennimore, on the other to Niels, and they often compared their kingdoms, disputing as to whose was the richest in wonders. They had names, too, for everything—for hills and hollows, paths and stiles, ditches and ponds; and if, here and there, they came upon an exceptionally large or splendid tree, it likewise received a name. Thus they took possession of the wood in every possible way, and thus, too, they created for themselves a little world unknown to any one else, where no one could move with such security as they—and yet, they had not one secret that the whole world might not have heard.

As yet they had not.

But love was in their hearts; and yet it was not—just as crystals are present in a supersaturated solution and yet not present, not until a splinter, or even the smallest particle, of the right substance falls into the fluid and separates out, as if by magic, the slumbering atoms, which rush to meet each other, wedging and riveting themselves together according to inscrutable laws—in one instant they are crystal . . . . crystal.

In the same way, it was a mere trifle which revealed to them the existence of their love.

There is nothing to tell; it was a day like every other, they were alone in the sitting-room as hundreds of times before, and their conversation

had been on the most ordinary subjects. What actually happened was as trivial and commonplace as could be: Niels was standing at the window looking out, and Fennimore went over and looked out too—that was all. But it was enough, for, as if by a flash of lightning, past, present and future were transformed for Niels Lyhne by the consciousness that he loved the woman who stood at his side; not as something bright and sweet and happy, that would exalt him to rapturous bliss—no, his feelings were of a very different nature. He loved her as something which he could no more do without than the breath of his life, and, like a drowning man, who clutches at any straw, he seized her hand and pressed it to his heart.

And she understood him. With all but a scream, and in a voice full of terror and misery, she cried, snatching away her hand, "Oh, yes, Niels!" and it was both answer and confession.

For a moment she stood pale and undecided, then sank on one knee upon a cushioned chair, and, hiding her face in its rough velvet back, sobbed aloud.

Niels could see nothing for a few seconds, and groped blindly among the bulb-glasses for support.

It was over in an instant, and, crossing to where she was crouching, he laid one hand upon the back of the chair and bent over her without touching her.

"Don't despair like this, Fennimore; look up and let us talk to each other. Won't you? You must not be afraid; let us bear it together, my darling. Come! See if you can."

She raised her head a little and looked up at him. "Oh, *what* shall we do? Isn't it terrible, Niels? Why should just this fate be mine? And how glorious it might have been—so happy!" and she sobbed afresh.

"Ought I to have been silent?" he moaned. "Poor Fennimore, do you wish you had never known it?"

She raised her head again and grasped his hand. "I should like to know it and be dead. Oh, that I lay in my grave and knew it! Oh, it would be so good, so good, so glorious . . . .!"

"It is bitter for us, Fennimore, that the first thing our love must bring us is sorrow and tears. Isn't it?"

"You must not be hard upon me, Niels, I cannot help it. You can't see it as I do; it is I who ought to be strong, because it is I who am bound. Oh that I could take my love by force and confine it in the hidden depths of my soul, and then, deaf to all its cries and entreaties, tell you to go away, far away! But I cannot, I have suffered so much, I cannot bear this too, I cannot, Niels. I can't live without you, see, can I? Do you think I could?"

She rose and clung to him.

"I am here and shall hold you fast; I *will* not let you go, and remain behind myself in the old darkness. It is like a bottomless depth of loathsomeness and torment; I *will* not throw myself into it, Niels, I would rather jump into the sea. And though the new life does bring sorrows, they

will at least be new sorrows ; they will not have the dull stings of the old, nor will they be able to strike home as surely as the old ones that know my heart so cruelly well. Am I talking wildly ? Yes, indeed, but it is so nice to be able to talk to you without reserve, without needing to be on my guard any longer against all the things it was not right to tell you. But now you have the first right of all. If only you could take me altogether, so that I would be wholly yours, and not belong in the least to any one else ! If only you could raise me above all these circumstances that hedge me in !”

“We must break through them, Fennimore. I shall arrange everything—don’t be afraid. Some day soon, before any one has the faintest suspicion, we shall be far away.”

“No, no, we must not run away, anything but that. Anything rather than that my parents should hear their daughter had run away. It is impossible ! I shall never do it. I swear to you, Niels, I shall never do it !”

“Oh, but you must, my child, you must. Think of all the meanness and ugliness that will surround us on all sides if we remain ; all the loathsome duplicity and dissimulation that will entangle us and weigh us down and make us wretched ! I will not have you stained with all this ; it shall not eat into our love like poisonous rust.”

But she was inexorable.

“You do not know what you are condemning us to,” he said, sadly ; “it would be better far to stride on now with heels of iron, instead of considering

the feelings of others. Believe me, Fennimore, if we do not let our love be everything to us, the first and only consideration in the world, something to be preserved at the cost of all else, making us wound where we would rather heal, and bring sorrow on those whom we would willingly guard from every shadow of sorrow—if we hesitate, you will find everything to which we submit loading itself heavily upon our shoulders, and forcing us to our knees, pitilessly and mercilessly. A fight upon one's knees ! You do not know how difficult it is. . . . You must not cry. We shall fight it, all the same, my darling, side by side, against all the world ! ”

For the first few days Niels continued his endeavours to persuade her to fly ; then, however, he began to picture to himself the blow it would be to Erik, if he came home one day and found wife and friend gone, and gradually the whole thing took on in his eyes the tragic and unnatural stamp of impossibility. He resolutely gave up thinking about it, as he gave up thinking of many other things he could have wished otherwise, and resigned himself heart and soul to circumstances as they were, without any conscious attempt to transform them in his fancy, or to conceal their defects from himself with fantastic garlands and festoons. But how sweet, too, it was to love, to love for once the love of real life ! For what he had believed to be love before had not really been love at all ! The overpowering longings of the lonely recluse, the ardent desires of the visionary and the apprehensive sensitiveness of

the child, had only been so many streams in the great ocean of love, isolated reflections of its full light—splinters of love, as meteors that rush through the air are splinters of a globe; for love was a world complete in itself, a vast and harmonious whole. There was no confused and meaningless hubbub of moods and feelings; love was like nature, ever changing and ever fruitful, and not a mood died, not a feeling withered, without giving life to the germ it bore, of something still more perfect. Quietly, healthily, with long-drawn breaths—this was the way to love, to love with your whole heart! And the days dropped new and bright from heaven itself just now, instead of succeeding each other as a matter of course, like the hackneyed pictures in a peep-show; each of them was a revelation, for on each of them he found himself abler, stronger and more mature. He had never known a like depth and intensity of feeling, and there were moments when he was conscious of such spiritual inexhaustiveness, when such a flood of tenderness overflowed his heart, when his vision was so wide and his judgments so nobly generous that he seemed to himself more Titan than man.

This was the beginning, and happiness, and they were happy for a long time.

The daily falseness and deception, the atmosphere of dishonour in which they lived had, as yet, no hold upon them; it could not reach them on the ecstatic heights to which Niels, in elevating their intimacy, had raised them. For he was not simply a man who seduced his friend's wife, or, to put it

more exactly, he was—he said to himself defiantly that he was—but, on the other hand, he had by this means redeemed a blameless woman, whom life had wounded, and stoned, and defiled, a woman who had already lain down to let her soul die. He had given her renewed confidence in life, and fresh faith in its highest powers ; he had elevated and ennobled her and brought her happiness. Which was the better, then, that undeserved misery or the fact that he had won her ? It was all the same to him, for he had made his choice.

He did not exactly mean all this. We have a way of erecting theories for ourselves in which we would rather not dwell ; our thoughts often advance much further than our sense of right and wrong has any mind to follow them. But this idea was present to him, and took away much of the cankerous venom from the duplicity, falseness and sordid ugliness that had become part of their lives.

After a time, though, they could not but be conscious of it ; it was eating into too many delicate nerves not to do damage soon and cause pain, and this process was accelerated by Erik declaring shortly after New Year that he had got an idea, something with a green tunic and a threatening attitude, he explained to Niels. Did he remember the green in Salvator Rosa's "Jonah" ? Something like that.

Although, to be sure, Erik's work mainly consisted of lying on the sofa in the studio, smoking shag and reading Marryat, yet for a time, it kept him much at home, thereby forcing them to be



doubly cautious, and making new devices and new lies necessary.

The ingenuity that Fennimore displayed in this direction brought the first cloud into the sky. At first it was nothing, nothing more than a doubt that flitted like thistledown across Niels' mind, as to whether his love was not perhaps nobler than the woman he loved. But this thought was not clear and precise; it was only a dim suspicion pointing out the way, only an imperceptible wavering of his mind, a leaning to one side.

But it came again with others in its train, which, at first vague and indefinite, too, were more and more clearly defined each time they returned. And it was astonishing at what a furious rate such thoughts could undermine and debase and take away from the splendour. Their love did not grow less; on the contrary, the lower it sank the more ardent and passionate it became; but these stolen pressures of the hand, these kisses in passages and behind doors, these long looks under the eyes of him they were deceiving, all robbed it of its lofty character. Happiness no longer stood still above their heads, they had to catch its smile and light as best they could; artifice and cunning were no longer sorrowful necessities, but pleasing triumphs; falsity became their true element, making them pitifully small and mean. There were degrading secrets, too, which they had formerly grieved over in silence, assuming ignorance of them before each other. They had to share them now, for Erik was not of a bashful nature, and he often took it into

his head to fondle his wife in Niels' presence, to kiss her or take her on his knee and embrace her, and Fennimore did not dare, or rather, she had not the right, to repulse these endearments, as she would formerly have done ; the consciousness of her guilt made her uncertain and afraid.

Thus sank and sank the lofty castle of their love, that castle from whose pinnacles they had looked out so proudly over the world and where they had felt so noble and so strong.

But they were happy amidst its ruins.

If they went into the wood now, it was generally on gloomy days when the mist hung from the brown branches and lay thick among the humid tree-trunks; for then no one could see them if they kissed here or embraced there, or hear their frivolous talk dying away in wanton peals of laughter.

The impress of the melancholy of eternity which their love had borne, was effaced ; there was nothing but laughter and mirth between them now, and they were overcome by such a feverish haste, such an avid desire for the fleeting moments of happiness, that it seemed as if they had to hasten with their love, instead of having their whole lives before them.

It made no difference to them that Erik grew tired of his idea at the end of a month, and recommenced his dissipations with such ardour that he was seldom at home two days in succession. Where they had fallen, there they remained. It may be, that once or twice in hours of solitude, they looked back with regret to the heights from which

they had fallen ; may be, they only thought with surprise of the strain it must have been to remain at that level, and felt the more softly bedded where they were. No change took place—none, at least, that led back to the old days. But the weak baseness there was in living as they did and yet not running away, became more and more apparent to them, coupling them more firmly and degradingly together in a common sense of guilt ; for neither of them wished things other than they were. Nor did they conceal this from each other, for they had arrived at the cynical confidence that commonly springs up between fellow-culprits, and there was nothing in their intimacy that they were afraid of putting into words. They called things by their right names with a pitiful courage, looked them straight in the face, they said, and saw them as they actually were.

In February it had looked as if winter were over, but then came mother March in her white mantle with its loose linings, and snowstorm after snowstorm covered the earth with thick coats. Later on, came the stillness of a hard frost, and the fjord was covered with ice six inches thick, which lasted for a long time.

One evening after tea, towards the end of the month, Fennimore sat waiting alone in the sitting-room.

The room was brilliantly lighted ; the piano stood open and both candles were burning, the shade had been taken from the lamp, and the gilt cornices and

everything hanging on the walls stood out distinctly with an apparent vigilance. The hyacinths had been removed from the windows and placed on the writing-table, where they formed a mass of colour, and filled the air with their pure, cool fragrance. The fire in the stove burned with a subdued and comfortable sound.

Fehnimore was walking up and down the room, trying to balance herself on one of the dark red stripes in the carpet. She wore a rather old-fashioned black silk dress, heavily trimmed, which swept after her, trailing from one side to the other as she walked.

She was humming to herself, and holding on with both hands to the string of large, yellow amber-beads that she wore round her neck; when she wavered on her red stripe she stopped humming, but kept hold of the necklace. Perhaps she was attempting to predict something by this means: if, for instance, she could walk up and down the room a certain number of times without getting off the stripe or letting go the necklace, Niels would come.

He had been there in the forenoon when Erik left, and had remained until towards evening, but he had promised to look over again as soon as the moon came out and there was light enough for him to avoid the ice-holes on the fjord.

Whatever the results had been, Fehnimore was finished with her predictions and went to the window.

It really did not look as if there would be any moon to-night, the sky was so black, and it was

much darker out on the grey-blue ice than on the land where the snow lay. It would certainly be best if he stayed away. She seated herself at the piano with a sigh of resignation, but rose again to look at the clock. Then she returned and resolutely set up before her a large thick volume of music, but, nevertheless, did not play ; she turned the leaves of the book absent-mindedly and fell into a rêverie.

What if, after all, he should be standing over there on the other side, strapping on his skates ! The next moment he would be here ! She saw him so distinctly : he was a little breathless after his exertion, and somewhat dazed with the light on coming in from the darkness outside. He brought in such a breath of cold air with him, and his beard was full of tiny glittering drops. Then he would say—what would he say ?

She smiled and looked down.

And still no moon !

She went to the window again and stood looking out into the darkness, until it seemed to her to be full of tiny white sparks and rainbow-coloured rings. But they were so indefinite. She would have liked fireworks out there, rockets that mounted up with long, long trails, and then turned into small snakes which bored their way into the sky and vanished with a faint report ; or else, a huge, spent ball that quivered in the air, and slowly descended in a rain of many-coloured stars. Look ! Look ! So soft and round—just like a courtesy, like the courtesy of a golden rain. Farewell, farewell ! That was the end. Oh, dear, *why* did he not

come?—and she did not want to play. At the same moment she turned to the piano and struck an octave loudly, holding down the keys until the tone had completely died away; then she repeated it, again and again and again. She did not want to play. No, not to play. But to dance, on the contrary! She closed her eyes for a moment and whirled in fancy through an immense hall of red and white and gold. How delightful it would be to be warm and thirsty with dancing and to drink champagne! This reminded her of the time at school when she and a friend concocted champagne from soda-water and eau de Cologne, and how sick it had made them!

She rose and walked across the room, instinctively arranging her dress, as after a dance.

"What if I were sensible now!" she said half aloud, and, taking her work, she settled down in a large armchair over by the lamp.

But she was not industrious; her hands soon sank into her lap, and by slow degrees she curled herself up snugly in the big chair, nestling into it with her cheek on her hand and her feet drawn up under her dress.

She wondered, with some curiosity, if other women were like her, if they had made a mistake and been unhappy, and then come to love another. One by one she passed in review the ladies at home in Fjordby. Then she thought of Fru Boye. Niels had told her about Fru Boye, and the woman had always been an irritating puzzle to her; she hated her and felt constantly humiliated by her.

Erik had also said once that he had been madly in love with Fru Boye.

Did any one know all about her ?

She laughed at the thought of Fru Boye's present husband.

And all the time she was thus occupied, she was longing and listening for Niels and imagining him coming, always coming, out there across the ice. She little dreamed that for the last two hours, from quite another direction, a small black dot had been working its way to her over the snowy fields, with very different tidings from those she was expecting across the fjord. It was only a man in frieze and oilskin, and at this moment he knocked at the kitchen window and frightened the servant.

It was a letter, said Trine, when she came in to her mistress.

Fennimore took it ; it was a telegram. She quietly handed the girl the receipt and let her go. She was not in the least uneasy ; Erik had telegraphed several times lately to say that he would be home the following day with some visitors.

She read it.

Suddenly she turned white and sprang wildly from her seat, staring with expectant horror at the door.

She would not have it brought in—she dared not ! With one bound she threw herself against the door and, pressing her shoulder to it, turned at the key until her hand bled. But, despite her violent efforts, it would not move. She let it go.

So it was true, then—it was not here at all, but far away from her in a strange house.

She began to tremble, her knees refused to support her, and she slid to the ground where she was.

Erik was dead. The horses had bolted and upset the carriage at a street corner, and Erik had been dashed head foremost against a wall. His skull was smashed, and he was now lying dead at Aalborg. This was how it had happened, and the most of it was contained in the telegram. There had been no one in the carriage with him but the white-necked tutor—the Arab—and it was he who had telegraphed.

She lay there wailing on the floor; her down-cast eyes were fixed and expressionless, and, both hands pressed flat upon the carpet, she rocked herself helplessly from side to side.

Only a moment ago all had been light and fragrant around her, and, however willing she might be, it was not possible to relinquish it all at once, for the pitch-dark night of sorrow and remorse. It was not her fault, but her mind was still haunted by brief dazzling glimpses of love's joys and love's delights, and foolish, passionate wishes would burst forth, yearning for the bliss of forgetfulness, longing to pull back with a convulsive wrench the revolving wheel of events.

But that was soon over.

Lured by the corpse of her happiness, dark thoughts came flying like ravens in black swarms from all sides, and they pecked away at it, beak to beak, while the warmth of life still lingered in it.



They hacked and tore it, making it unrecognisable and repulsive ; every feature was disfigured and distorted until it was nothing but a horrible and revolting mass of carrion.

She rose and moved about the room, supporting herself on chairs and tables like a sick person ; she threw a despairing glance upwards, as if seeking for a cobweb of help, just a comforting look or a small sympathetic caress. But her eyes only encountered the brightly illuminated family portraits, these strangers, who had been witnesses of her fall and her guilt—drowsy old gentlemen, prim-mouthed matrons and the eternal gnome-like child they were never without, the little girl with the large, round eyes and the bumpy mountain of a forehead. There were memories enough now associated with all this strange furniture : that table there, this chair, the footstool with the large poodle on it, and the *portière* like a dressing-gown—she had saturated them all with memories, wanton memories, which they now disgorged and flung at her—oh, it was horrible to be shut in with herself and with all these spectres of sin ! She shuddered at herself ; she menaced her, this infamous Fennimore, who crouched at her feet ; she tore away her dress from between her imploring hands. Mercy ? No, no mercy ! How could mercy be expected, when those dead eyes in the strange town saw, now they had failed, how she had trampled his honour in the dust, how she had lied on his lips and been faithless upon his heart ?

She could feel how they were fixed upon her,

these dead eyes, but she knew not whence they came; she writhed to elude their gaze, but they followed her incessantly, gliding over her like two icy rays. And while she kept her own eyes fixed on the floor until every thread of the carpet, every stitch in the footstools, stood out with unnatural distinctness in the sharp, strong light, she became aware of ghostly footsteps falling around her, and distinctly felt something brush against her dress. With a scream of terror she started aside; but then there seemed to be hands before her, and yet not hands, but something that was slowly clutching at her, clutching with derisive exultation at her heart, this miracle of falseness, this yellow pearl of faithlessness! She receded further and further, until she came in contact with the table, but it was still there, and her breast was no protection against it; it clutched through skin and flesh like. . . . She almost died with terror as she stood there, beholding defencelessly back over the table; every nerve was at a stretch with suspense, and her eyes stood out, as if they were to be murdered in their sockets.

Then it passed over.

She looked round with an uneasy glance, then sank upon her knees and prayed for a long time. She repented and confessed, wildly and recklessly, with ever-increasing vehemence, and with the same fanatic hatred for herself as that which drives the nun to scourge her naked body. She sought passionately for low words, intoxicating herself with self-abasement, and with a humility that craved for degradation.

At length she rose. Her breast heaved violently and excitedly, and a dull light lay upon her pale cheeks, which seemed almost to have grown fuller during her prayer.

She glanced round once more, as if she were registering a silent vow, and then went into the adjoining room. She shut the door after her and, pausing for a moment to get used to the darkness, groped her way to the door leading to the enclosed glass verandah, and went out.

It was lighter here ; the moon which by this time had come out, glistened on the crystalline particles of ice on the glass, shining yellow through the panes themselves, and red and blue through the rectangles of coloured glass that surrounded them.

She melted the ice in one place with her hand and carefully dried up the water with her handkerchief.

There was still no one to be seen on the fjord.

She began to pace up and down her glass cage. There was no furniture out here except a cane-bottomed sofa of warped wood, which was full of withered ivy-leaves that had fallen from the creepers on the ceiling. Each time she passed the leaves rustled gently in the draught, and now and then her dress found one on the floor, and dragged it over the boards with a grating sound.

Steeling herself against the cold, with her arms crossed on her breast, she paced to and fro on her melancholy watch.

He came.

Opening the door with a wrench, she stepped out in her thin shoes into the frozen snow.

She felt a satisfaction in doing this ; she would have gone barefoot to meet him.

Niels had slackened his speed at the sight of the black figure in the snow, and skated slowly in to land with cautious and tentative strides.

This creeping form seemed to burn into her eyes. Every movement, every trait that she recognised, struck her as a shameless insult, seemed to boast of degrading secrets. She trembled with hatred, her heart swelled with curses, and she could hardly control herself.

"It is I!" she called mockingly to him, "Fennimore, the harlot!"

"What in heaven's name, my darling . . ." he began in astonishment, now only a few steps distant from her.

"Erik is dead."

"Dead! *What?*" He had to step into the snow in his skates to keep from falling. "But tell me about it!" and he eagerly came a step nearer.

They were now standing face to face, and she had to put a restraint upon herself lest she should strike these pale distorted features with her clenched hand.

"I'll soon tell you," she answered. "He is dead, I say. While we were busy deceiving him here, the horses bolted with him at Aalborg and his skull was smashed."

"It is terrible," groaned Niels, putting his hand to his temples. "Who could ever have thought.

. . . . Oh, that we had been true to him, Fennimore! Erik, poor Erik!—if it had only been me!” And, bending with grief, he sobbed aloud.

“I hate you, Niels Lyhne!”

“Bah! What does it matter about *us*?” groaned Niels impatiently. “If only we had *him* again! Poor Fennimore,” he corrected himself, “never mind me. You hate me, you say? Yes, indeed, you may well hate me.” Suddenly he drew himself up. “Let us go in,” he said, “I don’t know what I am saying myself. Who did you say telegraphed?”

“In!” screamed Fennimore, growing furious at the scant heed he paid to her animosity. “In there! Never again shall you set your cowardly, dishonourable foot inside that house! How dare you think of such a thing, you wretch, you treacherous cur, you, who came slinking here and stole the honour of your friend, because it was ill-secured! What? Did you not steal it from under his very eyes, because he believed you were honourable, you thief?”

“Hush, hush, are you mad? What’s the matter with you? What words are those you are using?” He took her forcibly by the arm and, drawing her nearer, looked into her face with astonishment. “You must compose yourself,” he continued in a milder tone. “What is the good of laying about you with ugly words, child?”

She tore her arm away from him, causing him to totter on his insecure footing.

“Do you not hear that I hate you,” she screamed, “and is there not enough of an honest man’s brain

in you to let you understand that ? How blind I must have been to love you, you creature of lies and shams, while I had one at my side who was ten thousand times better than you ! I shall hate you and despise you to the end of my life. When you came here I was honest, I had never done any wrong, but then you came with your poetry and your dirt, and lured me down to you in the mire. What had I done to you that you could not let me alone, me, who should have been sacred to you above all others ? From one day to another I must live with this stain upon my soul, and I shall never meet with any one so low but what I must say to myself that I am lower still. You have poisoned all the memories of my girlhood. What have I now to look back upon that is pure and good ? It is all stained by you. Not only is *he* dead, but all that was beautiful and good in our life together is dead and putrid, too. Oh, God ! is it just that I can take no revenge upon you after all you have done to me ? Make me honest again, Niels Lyhne, make me spotless and pure again ! No, no—but it *ought* to be possible to torture you, until you made amends for the wrong you have done. Can you—can you do that with your lies ? Don't stand there shrinking beneath your helplessness, suffer here before my eyes, writhe with pain and despair, and be miserable ! Oh, God ! let him be miserable, do not let him steal my revenge from me as well ! Go, you wretch, go, I cast you from me, but be assured I shall drag you with me through all the torments that my hate can draw down upon you ! ”

She raised her arms with a menacing gesture, then turned and went, and the verandah door closed softly behind her.

Astonished, almost incredulous, Niels stood looking at the place where she had disappeared. He seemed to see it still, that pale, vindictive face, which rage had stamped with such strange coarseness and vulgarity, robbing it of its usual delicate beauty as entirely as if all its lines had been ploughed up by a pitiless and barbarous hand.

He stumbled cautiously back to the ice and commenced to skate slowly out towards the mouth of the fjord, with the moon before him and the wind at his back. As his thoughts took his attention off his surroundings, he gradually increased his speed, and the splinters of ice that flew from the blades of his skates were carried along by the rising wind and swept jinglingly with him over the glittering surface.

So this was the end! This was how he had redeemed a woman's soul, exalted it and restored its happiness! What a noble position he stood in towards his dead friend, the friend of his childhood, for whom he had been going to sacrifice life and future and everything he possessed! He with his sacrificing and redeeming! Heaven and earth should look at him if they would see a man, who kept his life upon the heights of honour, free from spot or blemish, in order that he should cast no shadow upon the Idea which he served and was called to proclaim!

He sped onwards.

Here again was one of his grandiloquent thoughts—as if his miserable life had power to make spots on the sun of the Idea! Good God! he always had to take everything so seriously! It was bred in the bone. If nothing better, he could at least be a Judas, and in tragic gloominess call himself Iscariot. That did savour of something. Must he always act as if he were responsible minister to the Idea and member of its priyy council, thus having everything that concerned mankind from the best authority? Would he never learn to strive unassumingly to do his duty in the garrison service of the Idea, as a private of an inferior rank?

There were red fires on the ice, and he passed so close to them that a gigantic shadow shot out for a moment from his feet, swept forward and vanished.

He thought of Erik and of the friend he had been to Erik. He! Childhood's memories wrung their hands over him, youthful dreams covered their heads and wept, his whole past looked after him with one long look of reproach. He had been false to all these for the sake of a love as small and mean as he himself. Yet there *had* been something sublime about their love, nevertheless; and he had been false to it, too. Whither should he flee to have done with these running leaps that always ended in the ditch? His whole life had been nothing else, and he knew—he felt quite confident—that in the time to come it would be just the same. He grew sick at the prospect of all this futile exertion, and wished from the bottom of his heart that he could



escape and be free from this meaningless fate. If only the ice would break beneath him as he darted forwards! A few gasps, as the cold water closed over his head, and there would be an end of everything.

Exhausted with his exertions, he paused and looked back. The moon had disappeared, and the fjord lay long and dark between the white slopes of the land. He turned back and worked his way against the wind. It was strong by this time, and he was tired. He tried to get into the shelter of the high land, but as he was struggling towards it he came upon a wind-hole, caused by a current of air from the hills, and the thin ice gave way beneath him with a tough, crackling sound.

How light of heart he felt, for all that, when he got on to firm ice once more! The fear of the moment had dispelled most of his fatigue, and he steered energetically forwards.

While he was wrestling outside, Fennimore sat in the brilliantly lighted room, tortured and disappointed. She felt as though she had been cheated out of her revenge. She did not know what she had expected, but it had been something quite different. She had had a vague idea of something grand and sublime—like swords and red flames—and yet hardly that so much as something that would take her up and set her upon a throne. As it was, it had turned out in such a petty, commonplace way, and she had felt more like a shrew than like one who curses. . . .

She had learned something from Niels after all.

Early next morning, while Niels, overcome with fatigue, was still asleep, she left the place.

## XII

FOR the greater part of two years Niels Lyhne wandered about abroad.

He was very lonely. He had no relations, no friend that was dear to his heart. But his desolation was greater than this ; for well may *he* feel afflicted and forsaken who, on the whole of this vast earth, has not a single little spot that he can bless and gratefully remember, to which he can turn his heart when the heart *will* overflow, for which he can long when longing *will* spread its wings ; yet if the bright fixed-star of a life-goal is shining above him, no night is so desolate that he is utterly alone. But Niels Lyhne had no such star. He did not know what to do with himself and his abilities. It was all very well for him to have talent, but the point was that he could make no use of it, and went about feeling like a painter without hands. How he envied others, both great and small, who, no matter where they chanced to seize upon existence, always got hold of some handle or other !—for never a handle could he find. He could only, it seemed to him, sing the old romantic songs over again, and this, in reality, was all that he had ever done. His talent appeared to be something remote

from himself—a silent Pompeii, or a harp that he could take down from the wall. It was not always present ; it did not go down the street with him or look out of his eyes or itch at his fingers' tips—by no means ; this talent of his had no real hold upon him. At times it seemed to him that he had been born half a century too late ; at others, again, that he had come too soon. His talent had its roots in something past and gone, from which alone it derived what life it had ; it could draw no nourishment from his opinions, convictions, or sympathies, nor could it absorb them and invest them with form. Talent and nature flowed apart like water and oil ; they might be shaken together, but they would never blend and become one.

He gradually began to see this, and it made him infinitely despondent, and the look he turned on himself and his past was one of distrustful scepticism. There must be some defect in him, he said to himself, some ineradicable defect at the core of his being, for he believed that life *could* reconcile the several sides of one's nature.

He was in this frame of mind when, in the last year of his exile, he settled down, early in September, in the little town of Riva, on the shores of Lake Garda.

Immediately after his arrival the country round about was enclosed by a wall of difficulties, which put a stop to travelling and kept all visitors away. Cholera had broken out in Venetia, extending as far as Desenzano in the south, and the neighbourhood of Trient in the north. Under these circumstances

Riva was not particularly lively ; the hotels had emptied at the first rumours, and travellers bound for Italy took a roundabout route.

The few who remained were thrown all the more closely together.

The most remarkable of these was a celebrated opera-singer, whose real name was Madame Odéro. Her stage-name was far more famous. She and her companion, Niels, and a deaf Viennese doctor, were the only visitors at "The Golden Sun," the first hotel in the town.

Niels felt singularly drawn towards her, and she yielded to a certain cordiality in his manner, such as one often finds in people who are at variance with themselves, and, for that reason, under the necessity of being at peace with others.

Madame Odéro was in the seventh month of her stay in Riva, where she had come for complete rest, in order to recover from the after effects of a throat complaint that had threatened her voice. Her doctor had prohibited all singing for an entire year, and, to keep her out of the way of temptation, music of any kind. He would not let her try to sing until the year was up, and if it then proved that not the slightest trace of fatigue ensued, she would be cured.

Niels acquired a kind of civilising influence over Madame Odéro, who was of an impetuous and fiery nature, with but few finer shades. It had been a terrible verdict for her to hear that she was to live for a whole year in seclusion, far from all homage and admiration, and, at first, she was utterly heart-

broken, looking forward, terror-stricken, to this coming year, as if it were a deep, black grave in which she was to be buried alive. Every one, however, seemed to think it was unavoidable, and early one morning she had fled to Riva. She might just as well have lived in a livelier and more fashionable place, but that was exactly what she did not want. She felt ashamed, felt as if she had some outward physical defect, and believed that she could see from people's looks how they pitied her because of her infirmity, and talked about it among themselves. She had, therefore, associated with no one in her new place of residence, living for the most part in her own rooms, the doors of which had to put up with a good deal of ill-usage when this voluntary imprisonment became too intolerable. Now that every one had gone she emerged again, and came into contact with Niels Lyhne, for she was not in the least afraid of one person at a time.

It was not necessary to be much in her society to get a clear idea as to whether she liked one or not, for she showed it plainly enough. What Niels Lyhne perceived was very encouraging, and they had not spent many days alone together in the magnificent hotel garden, with its pomegranates and myrtles, its bowers of oleanders and its glorious view, before they were on a very friendly footing.

There was absolutely no question of them being in love with each other, or, at any rate, it was not very serious. It was one of those pleasant, indefinite friendships that sometimes spring up between

men and women who are past their first youth with its fiery ardour and passionate longing for untasted happiness. It is a sort of Indian summer, in which we promenade gracefully side by side and make ourselves into a bouquet, caressing ourselves with another's hand and admiring ourselves with another's eyes. All the pretty secrets we possess, all the dainty worthless trifles we have accumulated, all the nicknacks of the soul, are brought out, passed from hand to hand and held critically up in an artistic search for the right light, while we compare and explain.

It is only, of course, when we take life easy that we have leisure for an exceptional relationship of this kind, but here by the beautiful lake these two had time and to spare. It was Niels who had made the beginning, by draping Madame Odéro, with his words and looks, in the robes of a becoming melancholy. Just at first she was several times on the point of tearing off all this finery and appearing as the barbarian she was, but when she found how well it became her she assumed melancholy as a *rôle*, and not only left off banging doors, but also sought out in her own heart such moods and feelings as were suitable to her new attire; and it was astonishing, as she gradually discovered, how little she had known herself. For her life had been too restless and unsettled to allow her any time to bring order into her soul, and, moreover, she was only now nearing the age at which women, who have seen a good deal of life and of the world in general, begin to treasure up their recollections,

and, looking back on themselves, to accumulate a past.

This was the beginning of their intimacy, and it developed so rapidly and decidedly that they soon became quite indispensable to each other. They only half existed when they were alone.

Then it was that one morning, when Niels was out on the lake, he heard Madame Odéro singing in the garden. His first impulse was to turn back and scold her, but before he had properly made up his mind he had glided out of hearing; besides, the wind was very tempting for a run to Limone, and he could be back by midday. So he continued on his course.

Madame Odéro had come down into the garden unusually early. The cool fragrance of the morning air, the rounded waves, bright and clear as crystal, that rose and fell beneath the garden wall, and the wealth of colour on every side—blue water, sun-burnt mountains, white sails flitting over the lake and red flowers arching above her head—all this, together with a dream which she could not forget, which was still rocked against her heart . . . it was impossible to keep silence, she had to take part in all this life.

And so she sang.

Fuller and fuller rang out her voice in its exultation; she was intoxicated with its beauty, she trembled with a voluptuous sense of its power; and she went on, she could not stop, so delightfully was she borne along through wonderful visions of coming triumphs.



And there was no fatigue! She might leave this place, leave it at once, and thus, shaking herself free from the nothingness of all these months, emerge again and exist.

By midday everything was ready for her departure.

Just as the carriages drove up to the door, she remembered Niels Lyhne. She snatched from her pocket a paltry little notebook that she carried about with her and filled the whole of it with parting words for Niels, the leaves being so small that there was only room for three or four words on each page; then she hastily slipped it into an envelope and drove off.

When Niels got back late in the afternoon—he had been detained in Limone by the sanitary police—she was long past Mori and in the train.

He was grieved, but hardly surprised, and felt not the slightest resentment; indeed, he even had a faint smile of resignation for this fresh proof of the malevolence of fate. But when he was sitting that evening in the empty moonlit garden, telling the landlord's little boy the story of the princess who found her wings again and flew away from her lover back to fairyland, he was seized with an intense longing to see Lönborggaard, to feel himself surrounded by something like a home, which would draw him in and hold him fast, no matter how. He could not endure the apathy of existence any longer—always let go on every side, always thrown back upon himself! No home on earth, no God in heaven, no goal in the future!

He would at least have a home, and he would make every nook and corner of the place love him, every tree and stone, all living and lifeless things—he would share his heart among them all and thus make it impossible for them ever to let him go again.

### XIII

FOR about a year Niels Lyhne had been living at Lönborggaard, directing the management of the place as well as he could and as much as his steward would permit him to do. He had taken down his shield, effaced the device it bore and resigned his place. Humanity would have to make shift without him. He had experienced the happiness to be gained from purely physical work, the happiness of seeing the pile grow beneath our hands, of being able to finish a thing so that it really is finished, of knowing that the strength we have expended is behind us in our work, and that the work will endure and neither be devoured by doubts in the night nor blown asunder by the carping criticism of the morning. There were no Sisyphean stones in agriculture.

And when he had worked until his limbs were weary, the pleasure it was to go to rest and renew his strength in sleep, only to expend it again, as regularly as night is followed by day, without being hindered by the caprices of his brain, without needing to treat himself as carefully as a tuned guitar with worn-out pegs.

He was genuinely happy in an uneventful way,

and he might often be seen sitting, as his father before him, on a gate or a boundary stone, staring with a strange vegetative fixedness across the golden corn or the heavy eared oats.

He had still not begun to associate to any great extent with the families in the neighbourhood, the only house at which he was anything like a frequent visitor being Councillor Skinnerup's at Varde. The Skinnerups had come to the town while his father was still alive, and, as the Councillor was one of Lyhne's old university friends, the two families had seen a great deal of each other. Skinnerup, a mild, baldheaded man with sharp features and gentle eyes, was now a widower, and had his house full to overflowing with four daughters, of whom the eldest was seventeen, the youngest twelve.

He was a man of wide reading, and Niels was fond of having a chat with him on all kinds of æsthetic subjects, for although he had begun to use his hands, he had not all at once become a boor. He enjoyed, too, the rather comical caution with which he was obliged to express himself, as soon as there was any question of a comparison between Danish and foreign literatures, or, indeed, as a general rule, whenever Denmark was compared with anything that was not Danish. It was quite necessary to be careful, the mild Councillor being one of those honest, rabid patriots who existed at that time, people who could be induced to admit pettishly that Denmark was not the most important of the great Powers, but who, otherwise, refused to make a single concession that could place the country or

anything belonging to the country, anywhere but in the very front. Another thing that he enjoyed about these conversations, but in a vague way and without attaching the least importance to it, was to watch the joyful admiration with which the seventeen-year-old Gerda followed him when he spoke; she always contrived to be present when he was there, and took such a warm interest in what was going on, that he would frequently see her flush with delight when he said something that she thought particularly fine.

The truth is that he had, all unwittingly, become this young lady's ideal; first and foremost, because, when he came riding into the town, he wore a grey Spanish cloak of a very romantic cut. Another reason was, that he always said, for example, Milano instead of Milan, and again, his being alone in the world and his rather melancholy expression. There were so many ways in which he was different from any one else either in Varde or Ringkjöbing.

One hot summer day, Niels came along the little street behind Herr Skinnerup's garden. The sun was pouring down upon the small, reddish-brown houses, the smacks lying in the river had mats hung over their sides to keep the pitch from melting and oozing out of the seams, and every door and window was wide open to admit a coolness that did not exist. Children were sitting at the open street-doors, learning their lessons aloud and rivalling the humming of the bees in the garden, and a flock of sparrows whirled silently from tree to tree, all rising

simultaneously at one moment, all settling down again the next.

Niels entered a small house that adjoined the garden, and while the woman ran to fetch her husband from a neighbour's, he was left alone in a neat, clean little room, that smelt of wallflowers and starched linen.

When, after having exhausted the pictures, the two dogs on the cupboard and the shells on the lid of the workbox, he crossed to the open window, he heard Gerda's voice just beside him, and there, indeed, were the four girls on their father's bleaching-green, close to the house.

Concealed by the balsams and other flowers in the window, he prepared both to hear and to see.

It was evident that a quarrel was going on, and the three younger sisters were making common cause against Gerda. They all had lemon-coloured ring-sticks in their hands, and the youngest had placed three or four of the red rings on her head, as a kind of turban.

It was she who was speaking.

"She says he is like the Themistocles on the office stove," she said to her two accomplices, turning up her eyes and assuming an ecstatic expression.

"Pooh!" said the middle one, a snappish little lady who had been confirmed in the spring. "Was Themistocles round-shouldered, I wonder?" and she imitated Niels Lyhne's slight stoop. "Themistocles with a vengeance!"

"But there's something very manly-looking

about him, he really is a man," quoted the twelve-year-old.

"He!" This was the middle one again. "He has always got scent about him, is that manly, pray? His gloves were lying on the table the other day, and you could smell the *millesieur* ever so far off."

"*All* perfections!" exclaimed the twelve-year-old with languid rapture, staggering backwards in deep emotion.

They acted as if all these remarks were directed at themselves and not at Gerda, who was standing at a little distance, blushing deeply and boring the point of her yellow stick into the ground. Suddenly she raised her head. "You are exceedingly rude girls," she said, "to talk like that about a person who is too good to look at you."

"After all, you know, he is only a mortal like the rest of us," the eldest of the three here interposed mildly, as if anxious to make peace.

"No, that's just what he's *not*," said Gerda.

"He, too, of course, has his faults," continued her sister, pretending not to hear what Gerda said.

"No!"

"Gerda, dear! You know very well that he *never* goes to church."

"Why should he? He is *much* cleverer than the pastor."

"Yes, but unfortunately, you see, he doesn't believe in any God at all, Gerda!"

"Well, you may be sure, my dear, that if he doesn't, he has good reasons for it."

"For shame, Gerda, how can you say such a thing?"

"You would almost think . . . ." broke in the middle one.

"What would you almost think?" asked Gerda, angrily.

"Nothing, nothing; please don't bite me!" answered her sister, suddenly assuming an air of extreme friendliness.

"Will you tell me this instant what it was?"

"No, no, no, no, no! I suppose I am at liberty to hold my tongue if I want to."

She and the twelve-year-old went off together, with their arms round each other's necks in sisterly concord.

Behind them went the eldest, strutting with indignation.

Gerda remained behind by herself and gazed defiantly before her, as she flourished her yellow stick in the air.

A moment or two afterwards the hoarse voice of the youngest was heard at the other end of the garden, singing:

You ask me, my boy,  
What I want with the withered flower,

Niels understood the allusion perfectly; not long ago he had made Gerda the present of a book, in which there was a pressed vine leaf from the garden in Verona where Juliet's grave is. He could hardly help laughing. Meanwhile, the woman, having at



length found her husband, returned with him, and Niels gave his orders for the joinery he had come to see after.

From this time forward Niels observed Gerda more particularly, and every day began to see more clearly how sweet and lovable she was ; and gradually his thoughts reverted with increasing frequency to this confiding little maiden.

But she was charming, too, and had much of the mild, pathetic beauty that almost brings tears to our eyes. The touch of luxuriant womanliness about her figure, which was full for her years, was rendered innocent, as it were, by a certain childish plumpness. Her small, delicately formed hands, which were just losing the rosiness of the transition period, were innocent, too, and entirely free from the nervous, restless curiosity of that epoch. She had such a full, pretty throat, such smoothly rounded cheeks, and a low, dreamy, girlish forehead, where great thoughts are so unusual that they almost give pain, and cause the full brows to knit perplexedly ! And her eyes ! Dark blue and deep—but deep only as water, of which the bottom is visible—between full, soft corners, where her smile found rest, sheltered beneath lids that were raised in wistful surprise. Such was little Gerda—pink and white and fair, with all her short golden hair daintily gathered into a sedate knot.

They had many a talk together, had Niels and Gerda, and he became more and more charmed with her : quietly and frankly at first, until one day there came a change in the air around them, a tiny

spark of what it would be too much to call sensuality, but which, for all that, is something that prompts hands, mouth and eyes to grasp at that which the heart cannot have close enough to its heart. And another day, shortly afterwards, Niels went to Gerda's father, because Gerda was so young and he was so certain of her love. And the father gave his consent and Gerda hers.

Towards spring they were married.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

It seemed to Niels Lyhne that existence had grown infinitely smooth and clear, life strangely simple to live, and happiness as near and as easy to attain as the air he drew in with every breath.

He loved her, this young wife that he had won, with all the delicacy of heart and thought, with all the vast and tender solicitude of a man who knows the tendency of love to sink and believes in the power of love to rise. He was very careful of this young soul, that deferred to him with unspeakable faith and clung to him with the same loving confidence—the same firm conviction that he desired nothing but her good—as the lamb in the parable had in its shepherd when it ate from his hand and drank from his cup. He had not the heart to take her God from her, to banish all those white hosts of angels which float through heaven, singing all day long, descend to earth at eventide and go from bed to bed, faithfully keeping watch and filling the darkness of the night with a protecting but invisible light. He was unwilling that his gloomy and prosaic views of life should push in between her

and the mild blue of heaven, and make her feel insecure and forsaken. But she wished it otherwise, wished to share everything with him ; there should not be a single place in heaven or on earth where their paths diverged, and, say what he would to restrain her, she refuted everything, if not in the exact words of the Moabite woman, yet with the same stubborn thought that was contained in them —thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. And now he began to teach her in earnest. He explained to her that all gods were the creation of man, and, like everything made by man, could not endure for ever ; that, on the contrary, race after race of gods was doomed to decay, inasmuch as mankind is constantly changing and developing, and always growing out of its ideals. And a god in whom the greatest and noblest peoples had not deposited their richest intellectual possessions, a god who did not receive his light from mankind, but had to shine by virtue of himself, a god who was not in a state of development, but had stiffened in the historic chalk of dogmas, was no longer a god, but an idol ; and for this reason Judaism had been right, as opposed to Baal and Astarte, and Christianity right, as opposed to Jupiter and Odin, for an idol is nothing and worse than nothing. Mankind had advanced from one god to another, and therefore, referring to the old god, Christ could say that He had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, and, on the other hand, to point beyond Himself to a still loftier, divine ideal, with those mystical words of His about the sin that

shall not be forgiven, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

He taught her, further, how the belief in a personal God who orders everything for the best, and punishes and rewards in a future life, was only a subterfuge to escape the sternness of reality, an impotent endeavour to take the sting from the distressing arbitrariness of existence. He showed her how it would necessarily blunt man's sympathy with the unfortunate and make him less ready to stake all his faculties to assist them, if he could comfort himself with the thought that all that was endured in this short earthly life paved the way of the sufferer to an eternity of joy and splendour.

He laid particular stress on the strength and independence the human race would acquire when, with firm faith in itself, it sought, as a whole, to live its life in harmony with what each individual in his best moments, ranked highest in his nature, instead of depositing it outside himself in a controlling deity. He made his belief as attractive and beautiful as he could, but he also did not conceal from her how oppressively gloomy and cheerless the truths of atheism would be to bear in time of trouble, as compared with that bright, happy dream of a Heavenly Father who guides and governs. But she was brave; many of his doctrines, it is true, shook her to the depths of her soul, and frequently just those one would least have expected to do so; but her confidence in him knew no bounds, her love descended with him from all heavens, and the strength of her affection brought conviction with

it. And as, in the course of time, these new ideas grew old and familiar, she became fanatic and intolerant to the last degree, as has always been the way with young disciples who love their master dearly. Niels often rebuked her, but what she could never understand was, why, if their belief was the true one, that of other people was not odious and reprehensible.

For three years they lived a happy life together, and much of the happiness shone from the face of a little child, a little son, who came to them in the second year of their marriage.

Happiness, as a rule, has a good effect on people, and Niels honestly strove to make their life in every way noble, useful and beautiful, that there might be no pause in the upward growth of their souls towards the human ideal in which they both believed. But he had ceased now to think of bearing the standard of the Idea out into the world; he was content to follow it. It might happen now and then that he took up his old attempts again, but he was always surprised to think that it was really he who had written all these pretty, clever things, and his eyes invariably filled with tears at his own verses. Not for anything in the world, however, would he have changed places with the poor wretch who wrote them.

Suddenly, at the beginning of spring, Gerda took ill and there was no hope of recovery.

Early one-morning—it was the last—Niels was watching beside her. The sun was just rising and cast a red glow on the white blinds, while the

morning light, that found its way in at the side of the curtains, was still blue, making the shadows blue between the white folds of the bed and beneath Gerda's pale, thin hands, that lay clasped before her on the sheet. Her cap had slipped off and she was lying with her head far back ; she was much altered, and the sharp, pointed features of sickness gave her a strangely distinguished look. She moved her lips, as if to moisten them, and Niels reached for the glass containing the dark red draught, but she shook her head. Suddenly she turned her face towards him and gazed with an effort at his troubled features. The longer she looked at all the deep grief they displayed and the utter hopelessness imprinted on them, the more surely did her uneasy suspicions become a terrible certainty.

She tried to rise, but could not.

Niels bent over her quickly and she took hold of his hand.

"Is it death?" she asked, lowering her faint voice, as if she were afraid to say it aloud.

He only looked at her in silence, uttering a long-drawn sigh of grief.

Gerda grasped his hand, throwing herself over to him in her fear. "I dare not!" she said.

He slid to his knees beside the bed and put his arm under the pillow, thus almost holding her on his breast. He could hardly see her for the blinding tears that rolled, one after another, down his cheeks. He raised her hand, together with a corner of the sheet to his eyes ; then he found his voice again. "Tell me everything, little one," he said ; "let

nothing trouble you. Is it the pastor?" He could not believe it was, and there was a tone of doubt in his voice.

She made no answer, but, closing her eyes, drew her head back a little as if to be alone with her thoughts.

There was a pause. The long, sweet note of a blackbird was heard beneath the windows, then another joined in and yet a third, and a long series of flute-like tones penetrated the silence of the room.

She looked up again. "If you were coming, too!" she said, leaning more heavily against the pillow that he supported. This was meant for a caress, and he felt it . . . . "If only you were coming, too! But alone!" She drew his hand gently to her and then let it go—"I dare not." A look of fear came into her eyes. "You must go for him, Niels; I dare not go up there alone like this. You see, we never thought that I should die first; it was always you who were to lead the way. I know very well . . . . but what if we *have* been mistaken! You know we *might* be, Niels, mightn't we? You think not, but it is very strange—if *every one* were mistaken, and all the great churches meant nothing at all . . . . and when people are buried, the bells . . . . I have always thought that the bells . . . ." She lay silent for a time, as if she were listening for them and heard them.

"It is impossible, Niels, that death can be the end of everything. You can't feel this; -you are strong and well; you think that because we are so

feeble, and everything is fading away, it must destroy us altogether. But that is only as far as the outside world is concerned ; within us there is just as much soul as there ever was—yes, Niels, I have it all within me, all that I ever had, the same infinite world, only stiller, more alone with itself, just as things seem when we close our eyes. It is like a light, Niels, it is being borne away from you into the darkness, into the darkness, and it seems to you to be growing fainter and fainter and fainter, until you can see it no longer, but away over there it is shining as brightly as before. . . . Far away. . . . I always thought that I should live to be an old, old woman and stay here with you all, and now I am forced to leave you—they are taking me away from house and home and making me go quite alone. I am afraid it is God who rules where I am going, Niels, and He does not trouble Himself about all our cleverness here on earth ; He will have His own and nothing else, and it seems so far away from me now, all that is His. I have not been very wicked, have I ? But it isn't *that* . . . go for the pastor, Niels, I want so much to see him.

Niels rose at once and went for the pastor ; he was thankful that this had not happened at the very last moment.

The pastor came and remained alone with Gerda.

He was a handsome, middle-aged man, with fine, regular features and large, brown eyes. He was, of course, aware of the position of both Niels and



Gerda with regard to the Church, and now and then, too, various hostile expressions of the young wife's fanaticism had come to his ears. It did not, however, occur to him to speak to her as a heathen or a renegade ; he perfectly understood that it was only her great love that had led her astray, and he understood also the feeling which, now that love could go no further with her, made her long with fear and trembling to be reconciled to the God she had known of yore ; and, therefore, in his talk with her he sought chiefly to awaken her slumbering memories, and read her those psalms and parts of the gospels which he imagined she would know best.

And he was not mistaken.

How familiar and solemn was the sound of these words—like the chiming of bells on Christmas morning ! How quickly it rose before her mind, that land in which our fancy was first at home, the land where Joseph dreamed, where David sang, and the ladder stands that reaches from earth to heaven ! There it lay with its figs and mulberries, and the Jordan shone like silver through the morning mist ; Jerusalem lay red and sorrowful in the light of the setting sun, but Bethlehem was wrapped in glorious night, with large stars in the dark blue heaven. How rapidly the faith of her childhood welled forth again ! She was once more the little girl who went to church at her mother's side and sat and froze and wondered why people sinned so much. But she grew up again beneath the sublime words of the Sermon on the Mount, and lay there as the

dying sinner, when the pastor spoke of the sacred mysteries, the sacraments of baptism and communion. Then the true spirit took possession of her heart—that lowly bending of the knee before the Almighty God of judgment, those bitter tears of penitence in the presence of the God who suffered betrayal, ridicule and torture, and that humble, yet presumptuous longing for a new covenant of bread and wine with the God of mystery.

The pastor went; later on in the morning he returned and administered the sacrament to her.

Her strength sank rapidly in fitful flickers, yet at dusk, when Niels took her in his arms for the last time, to say good-by to her before the shadows of death came too near, she was still perfectly conscious. But the love that had been the greatest joy of his life had died out of her eyes; she was his no longer; her wings were even now beginning to grow, she longed only for her God.

Towards midnight she died.

They were gloomy days that followed. Time swelled out into something monstrous and repulsive; every day was a boundless waste of emptiness, every night a hell of memories. Months elapsed, and the summer was drawing to a close before the foaming torrent of his grief had dug out a channel in his soul, where it could flow on, a murmuring, heaving stream of melancholy and regret.

• Then it was, that one day on coming in from the fields, he found his little boy very ill. He had been ailing for the last few days and restless the night

before, but no one had suspected that it was anything serious ; now he lay in his little bed burning and shivering with fever and groaning with pain.

The carriage was instantly sent to Varde, but none of the doctors in the town were at home and it had to wait for hours. As late as bedtime it had not returned.

Niels sat by the child's bed ; every half-hour at least he sent some one out to look and listen if the carriage were coming. A messenger on horseback was despatched to meet it, but no carriage was to be seen, and he rode right on to Varde.

This waiting for assistance that did not come, made it all the more distressing to witness the child's sufferings. And the malady made rapid progress. About eleven o'clock an attack of convulsions came on, and from this time forward recurred at shorter and shorter intervals.

Soon after one the messenger returned with the information that the carriage could not be expected for some hours yet, as none of the doctors had got home when he left the town.

Then Niels broke down ; he had resisted despair as long as it was possible to hope, but now he could resist it no longer. He went into the unlighted room adjoining the sick-room and gazed out into the night, while his nails dug into the woodwork of the window. His eyes devoured the darkness in search of hope, his brain crouched for a spring at a miracle ; then it was clear for a moment and still, and in this clearness he turned from the

window and, throwing himself across a table beside him, sobbed without tears.

When he returned to the sick-room the child was in convulsions. He stood and watched it, as though he would kill himself with the sight : these small, clenched hands, white with bluish nails, these staring eyes, almost rolling out of their sockets, this distorted mouth, and the little teeth grinding like iron against a stone—oh, it was terrible, and yet this was not the worst. No, when the convulsions ceased and the little body, growing soft and flexible again, abandoned itself to the joy of the lesser pain—the fear that came into the child's eyes when it dimly perceived that the pain was returning, the beseeching appeals for help as the torture came nearer and nearer ; oh, to see all this and be powerless to help, help even with his heart's blood, with everything that he possessed ! He raised his clenched fists threateningly to heaven, he seized his child with an insane idea of flight, and then, flinging himself upon his knees, he prayed to the God in heaven, who holds the earth in subjection by means of trials and discipline, who sends need and sickness, suffering and death, who wills that every knee be bent in fear and trembling, from whom no flight is possible—either to the uttermost seas or the nethermost depths—to Him, the God, who, if it pleases Him, tramples upon the heart we love best in the world, and tortures it beneath His foot, until it is once more the dust of which He created it.

With such thoughts did Niels Lyhne pray to

God, and, casting himself helplessly before the throne of heaven, acknowledge that His was the power and His alone.

But the child's sufferings continued.

When, towards early morning, the old family doctor drove in at the gate, Niels was alone.

## XIV

It is autumn now ; there are no more flowers on the graves up in the churchyard, and the withered leaves lie mouldering in the damp, under the trees in the garden at Lönborggaard.

Niels Lyhne goes through the empty rooms in a mood of bitter melancholy. Something gave way within him the night the child died ; he has lost confidence in himself and faith in man's power to support the life he has to live. Existence has grown sallow, and its contents ooze aimlessly out on all sides.

It was no use his calling that prayer he had offered up the insane cry of a father beseeching help for his child, although he knew that no one could hear his cry. He had been aware of what he was doing in the midst of all his despair. He had been tempted and he had fallen ; it *was* a fall, a backsliding from himself and from the Idea. It was evident that the traditions in his blood had been too strong for him. For thousands and thousands of years the human race had always called on heaven in its need, and he had yielded to the inherited impulse ; but he ought to have resisted it as an evil instinct, for did he not know to the

deepest fibres of his brain that gods were dreams and that it was a dream to which he had flown for refuge when he prayed, just as in former days, when he cast himself into the arms of his fancies, he had known that they *were* fancies? He had not been able to support his life as it was; he had been helping to fight for the noblest cause and, in the heat of battle, had deserted the colours to which he had sworn allegiance. For the new ideal, atheism, the holy cause of truth—what was the aim of it all, what *was* it all, in fact, but a tinsel-name for the simple endeavour to bear life as it was? To bear life as it was, and let it take shape according to the laws that govern it!

It seemed to him that his life had come to a close with that night of torture; all that followed could only be uninteresting scenes, tacked on to the fifth act after the action was played out. He could quite well, of course, take up his former views again if he felt inclined; but he had fallen *once*, and it was a matter of indifference to him whether in days to come it happened again or not.

Such was the frame of mind he was oftenest in at this time.

Then came that November day when the king died,\* and war became more and more imminent.

As soon as he had put his affairs in order, he offered himself as a volunteer.

He found the irksomeness of training very easy to bear, for the mere fact of being no longer a superfluous person meant more to him than he

\* November 15, 1863.

could tell ; and when he joined the army, the perpetual struggle with the cold, the vermin, the discomforts of all kinds, everything, in short, that chased thoughts home and forced them to occupy themselves with what lay immediately before their door, made him almost cheerful, and his health, which had suffered somewhat from the troubles of the past year, became once more unexceptional.

On a cheerless day in March he was shot in the breast.

Hjerrild, who was doctor at the hospital, arranged that he should be laid in a smaller room, in which there were only four beds. One of the occupants of this room had been shot in the spine and lay perfectly still. Another, who was wounded in the breast, had been lying there some days, raving for hours on end in hasty, broken words. The third, who was in the bed next Niels, was a tall, sturdy peasant lad, with fat, round cheeks ; his brain had been pierced by a splinter of shell and, hour after hour, without intermission, at intervals of about half a minute, he simultaneously raised his right arm and his right leg and immediately let them fall again, accompanying this movement with an audible, but dull and lifeless " Hah-ho, hah-ho ! " which was always strictly in time, always precisely the same—" hah " when he raised his limbs, " ho " when he let them fall.

There Niels Lyhne lay. The ball had pierced his right lung and had not reappeared. Little or no ceremony can be observed in war, and he soon learned that he had not much chance of life.



He was surprised at this, for he did not feel as if he were dying, and his wound gave him no great pain. But before long a sense of weakness overcame him, which told him that the doctor was right.

So this was to be the end. He thought of Gerda, thought of her a great deal the first day, but he was constantly troubled by the remembrance of the strange, cold look in her eyes when he took her in his arms for the last time. How beautiful, how pathetically beautiful it would have been, had she clung to him up to the very end, hanging upon his look until her eyes failed in death, content to have breathed out her life to its last breath upon the heart that had loved her so well, instead of turning from him at the last moment to preserve herself for more life, more life still !

The second day at the hospital Niels grew more and more depressed with the heavy atmosphere of the place, and the longing for fresh air and the desire to live were strangely interwoven in his mind. There had been much that was beautiful in life, after all, he thought to himself, as he recalled the fresh breeze on the shore at home, the cool rustling of Zealand's beech-forests, the pure mountain-air at Clarens, and the gentle evening breeze on Lake Garda. But when he thought of his fellow-men, he grew sick at heart again. He called them before his mind, one after the other, and they all passed him by and left him alone—not one remained behind. But had *he* held fast to them ? Had *he* been faithful ? It was only that he had been slower

to let go. No, that was *not* it. It was this great melancholy truth that a soul is always alone. Every belief in the blending of soul with soul was a lie. Not the mother, who takes us on her knee, not the friend, not the wife, who rests upon our heart. . . .

Towards evening the wound became uneasy and the pain constantly increased.

Hjerrild came and sat by him for a moment in the evening ; at midnight he returned and remained for a long time. Niels was suffering much and groaning with agony.

"A word in earnest, Lyhne," said Hjerrild : "would you like to see a clergyman ?"

"I have no more to do with clergymen than you," whispered Niels angrily.

"There is no question of me, I am alive and well. Don't lie torturing yourself with your opinions ; people who have to die have no opinions, and those they have do not matter. Opinions are only there for use in life ; in life they serve their ends. What can it avail a single mortal whether he dies with one set of opinions or another ? Believe me, there is not one of us but has some bright, sweet memories of his childhood ; I have seen many scores die, and it always gives comfort to bring these memories out. Let us be honest—we may be whatever we like to call it, but we can never get God quite out of heaven. Our brain has imagined Him up there too often ; He has been rung into it and sung into it from the time we were little children."

Niels nodded.

Hjerrild bent over him to hear if he was going to say anything.

"You mean well," said Niels, "but——" and he shook his head decidedly.

There was silence for a long time; only the peasant lad's perpetual "Hah-ho, hah-ho," slowly hammered the time to pieces.

Hjerrild rose. "Farewell, Lyhne," he said; "after all, it is a glorious death to die for our poor country."

"Yes," said Niels, "but still, this was not the way we dreamed of doing our share, that time, long, long ago."

Hjerrild went; on entering his own room he stood at the window for a long time looking up at the stars. "If I were God," he murmured, and in thought he continued, "I would rather save the one who did not turn round at the last moment."

Niels' pain grew more and more intense; it hewed and hacked mercilessly at his breast and became unbearable. It would have been so good to have a God to cry and pray to.

Towards morning he began to grow delirious; the inflammation was rapidly increasing.

And so it went on for two days and nights.

The last time Hjerrild saw Niels Lyhne he was lying raving about his armour, and about how he wished to die standing.

And at last he died the death, the bitter death.















